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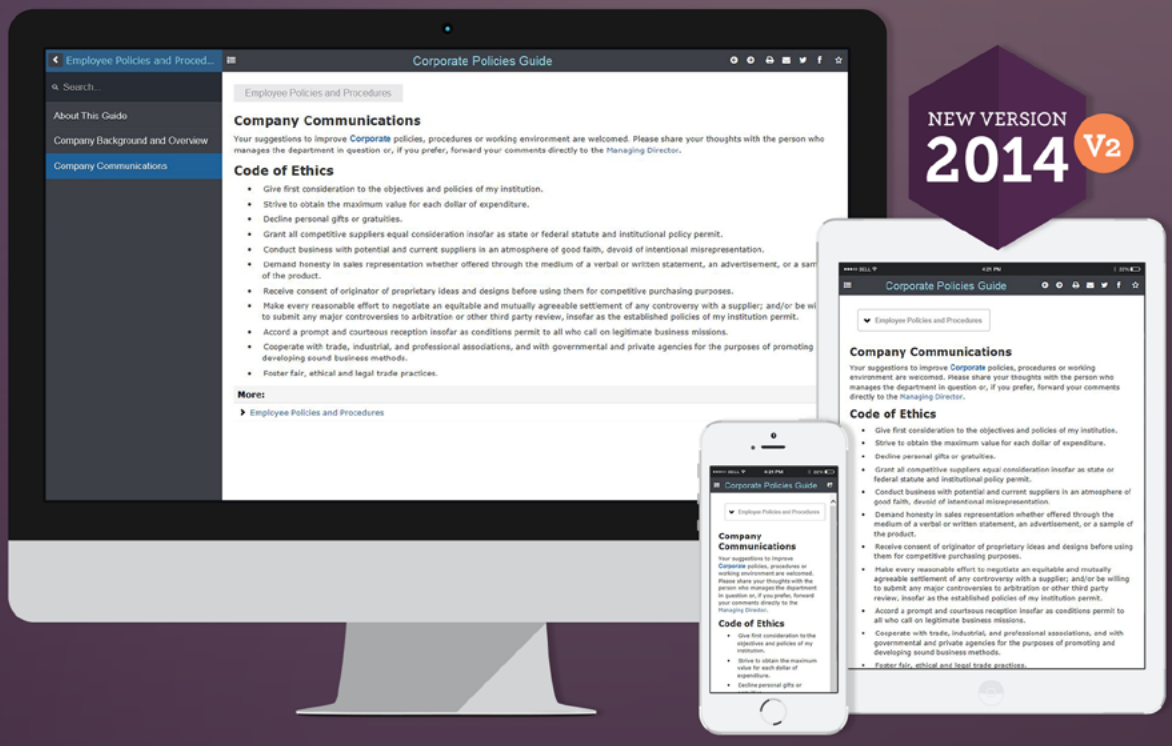

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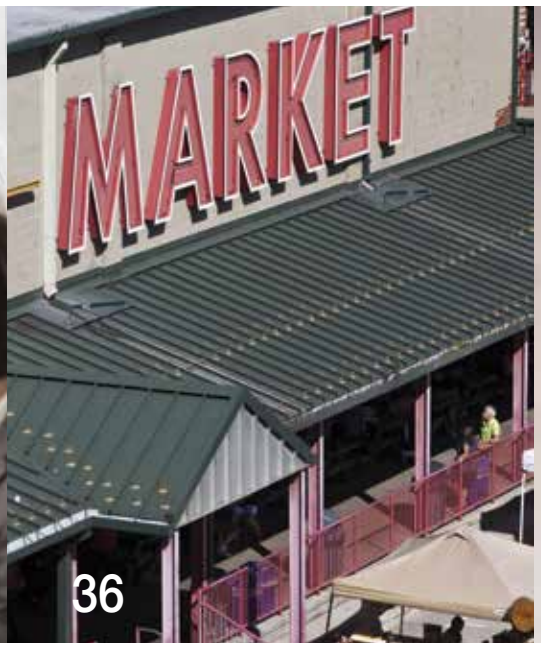

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A Note from the Editor

HAPPY NEW YEAR! We're kicking off 2015 with an exciting issue of *Intercom*. This month you will find a special section on technical and professional writing and editing fundamentals, guest edited by Marcia Riefer Johnston, a product review of MadCap Lingo 9, and an interview with Anthony Olivier, MadCap founder and CEO, about the recent acquisition of Doc-To-Help.

There are 10 articles on fundamentals this month. Six of the articles appear in print, while an additional four articles are published in *Intercom* online. Guest editor Marcia Riefer Johnston is a well-known technical communicator and writer who has collected some of her own essays into a popular book titled *Word Up! How to Write Powerful Sentences and Paragraphs (And Everything You Build from Them)*. In college, she wrote one-act plays that were performed on the campus stage and studied under Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff in the Syracuse University creative-writing program. She taught technical writing in the Engineering School at Cornell University. Marcia has also written for the scholarly journal *Shakespeare Quarterly*, STC's professional journal *Technical Communication*, and the weekly newspaper *Syracuse New Times*. Within STC, she has been involved in both the Central New York and the Willamette Valley Chapters.

The articles in this issue run the gamut from guidelines for writing traditional manuals to writing for translation, to writing training-video scripts, to transitioning to marketing writing marketing, writing business emails, and working as or with editors. The online articles include topics by Laura Creekmore, Danielle Villegas, Sharon Burton, and David Caruso on crafting emails, being a technical writer, loving your job, and giving conference talks to become a better communicator. I want to thank Marcia and all the authors for producing such an interesting and varied issue on writing fundamentals. An excellent start to a new year in technical communication!

—Liz Pohland
liz.pohland@stc.org

From the Guest Editor

STORY ONE. I was invited to give a preconference workshop on concise writing. I called it "Rock Your Readers: Turn Content Coal Into Diamonds." For months, I promoted it. Others promoted it. No one signed up. What could I do? I considered staying home. Instead, I renamed my talk "Teach Your Text to Strip: Take It Off—Take It (Almost) All Off." I filled the room. **Change a title, draw a crowd.**

Story two. I heard a usability professional describe a test conducted by *Amazon.com*. What did these technology wizards want to discover? They wanted to learn which version of a text passage their customers found more usable: the one with the semicolon or the one with the period. I don't know whether the semicolon or the period won the day. What sticks with me is that Amazon spent hard, cold research bucks to find out. **Change a punctuation mark, improve usability.**

Story three. I attended a talk by a search-engine marketer. He gave an eager audience tip after tip for improving any Web page's conversion rate, the percentage of people who answer the call to action: buy a book, subscribe to a newsletter, make a phone call. Among other strategies, he urged us to experiment with button text. For example, see how many clicks you get when a button says "Submit" versus, well, any other phrase. The differences he described were stunning. **Change a label, increase sales.**

These three stories all point to something that technical writers have always known. In business as in other realms that involve the written word, saying a thing one way rather than another matters. Language-usage decisions affect the bottom line. Text is money.

Unfortunately, basic writing skills often get edged out of the spotlight in this era of DITA, content strategy, information architecture, XML authoring, user/customer/information experience, and other topics that put the *technical* in *technical writing*. So it's fitting that *Intercom* occasionally puts out an issue like this one that focuses on the writing. Sometimes even writers need the reminder. **Hire a writer, get results.**

—Marcia Riefer Johnston

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The More Things Change, the More (Some) Things Need to Stay the Same

By NEAL KAPLAN | *Member*

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THE FIELD OF TECHNICAL WRITING has been disrupted. In my career as a technical writer, I've gone from writing everything from printed manuals and quick reference guides to creating video content for online help, wikis, and mobile devices. In the last few years, our profession has seen major changes in job roles and titles as technical communication practitioners align their efforts with business analysis, content strategy, user experience, and other fields that seem to pop up daily.

On the one hand, this shift is awesome because of the potential for our skills to contribute more and more to the success of our employers and our clients. On the other hand, for those of us who have worked in tech comm for years, this shift can feel more than a little scary. Yes, we do need to change, but we don't need to be afraid. Through any shift in titles, reporting structures, technologies, or responsibilities, the fundamentals of what makes a good technical communicator have always been—and need to remain—the same. Here are some of the most important fundamentals:

- Collaboration
- Empathy
- Facilitation
- Writing ability
- Minimalist mindset
- Adaptability
- Responsibility
- Openness to feedback

Collaboration

When I started my first job and was asked to update a quick reference guide, I knew one thing: that I knew nothing. I didn't know where to start. I didn't know what information I needed to update, what I needed to add, what I needed to remove, or who might know these things. My manager could help with the who; I had to figure out the what. I had to learn that good technical content requires collaboration.

That project was perfect for a new writer: to figure out the what, I had to talk to a lot of whos. I worked with other tech writers to learn the documentation tools and find the source files. I talked to project managers about new features. And, of course, I talked to our developers to learn how those features worked.

Because this was a quick reference guide, it had to cover every feature in the product. There were UI references and keyboard shortcuts, command-line syntax diagrams and file requirements, troubleshooting tips and a glossary.

I needed information from almost everyone in the building. I had to learn how to schedule meetings and what people expected from me. I learned that my coworkers were busy people and that I needed to come prepared with goals for every meeting and lists of questions that would let me achieve them.

The more things change, the more we need to collaborate.

Empathy

We know that it's critical that we empathize with our customers. They turn to the documentation (or videos) only when they have to. Something is blocking their progress. They need help now.

What about empathy for our subject matter experts? During that first quick reference project, I learned to say thank you and mean it. I learned that without the help of subject matter experts, we can't do our jobs. As technical communicators, we need empathy for our customers and our coworkers.

Technical communicators work with more people in a company than nearly any other job type. We must to develop the social (or "soft") skills that, while difficult to measure, are of incredible value. During a typical week, I work with product management, engineering, technical operations, customer support, training, marketing, and even the sales team. Technical writers are a company's primary content creators, and the information that we use to build that content comes from every department.

I've learned that the only way I would get a second meeting with a subject matter expert is to make my requests (and intentions) clear, respect their time, and show appreciation for their help.

Like many technical communicators, I can be an introvert. But it's critical that we push ourselves and meet with our coworkers in person when we can, or via phone or Web conference when that's not possible. I guarantee that you'll get a lot more information that way, both in the initial meeting and in future meetings, now that you know each other as more than lines of text in email exchanges.

The more things change, the more we need to have empathy.

Facilitation

Our subject matter experts are wonderful, but they're not omniscient. Sometimes they forget a few details, or maybe someone else changed something without notifying everyone. This should be our mantra: trust, but verify. We need to not only collaborate with our subject matter experts but also facilitate open communication throughout our organization.

I met with many people across the organization while researching that quick reference guide. Every so often, something that a developer told me wouldn't quite match what I'd heard from a customer support agent or product manager. This led me to discover one of my favorite things about technical communication: that moment when you realize that two (or more) people need to talk to each other.

It's never a case of pointing fingers or blaming anyone for deliberate wrongdoing. We aren't tattletales or scolds, and it would cripple our ability to do work if our coworkers saw us that way. Instead, as communicators ourselves, we help foster communication among other teams.

It's frustrating when internal communication breaks down. Technical communicators can be more than messengers. We can be ambassadors. In this new enterprise environment, we need to use our skills to help topple silos and break down barriers between departments. We can do this not just by comparing notes, but also by setting up open communication channels and encouraging our coworkers to talk to each other as often as they talk to us. Open communication across our companies allows us to do our jobs more efficiently, resulting in more complete, better quality technical documentation.

The more things change, the more we need to facilitate communication.

Writing Ability

Coming into technical writing straight out of college, I quickly learned that technical writing requires more than a familiarity with basic grammar. That's the starting point, and it's critical that we know our way around a sentence. But I had to learn to write in a style that matched our customers' expectations, eliminated ambiguity, and kept our translation costs low.

My company had a style guide that discussed all of that in exhaustive detail. There were strict rules about word usage and tips on eliminating repetitive words and expressions that don't add value to the documentation. I've collected several style guides over the years, and I'm glad to see that we're transitioning away from writing overly serious, stilted content.

But the rules promoting clear language stick with you. I'm always looking out for ambiguous words that can be misinterpreted, especially by nonnative English speakers or translators. I've had a few fun conversations with non-tech-writer coworkers who wanted me to tell our customers to "depress a button." I had to explain that I wasn't about to turn our customers into sadists!

Honing our writing skills allows us to turn complex technical concepts and instructions into clear, simple (but not simplistic) content. Using simplified language expands the number of customers who can understand our writing, and it makes it easier and less expensive for translators to do their jobs.

The more things change, the more value writing ability has for our businesses.

Minimalist Mindset

Minimalist documentation is clear, functional, and relevant to customer concerns—enough information and no more. It serves busy readers who want to answer questions and get on with their work.

On my first quick reference guide, at first I went too far, stripping away explanation and context, leaving the reader with only the most basic tips and interface labels.

These skills ensure that no matter what buzzwords find their way into our titles or what tools we're asked to use, we continue to create valuable content for our companies.

To become an effective technical communicator, I had to learn what minimalism really means. It took a lot of work and many edits to make sure that there was enough information to help readers without overwhelming them with unimportant details.

We must bring this minimalist mindset to technical documentation—and to customer support, marketing, product planning, business discovery documents, or any other communications deliverable we might create.

The more things change, the more important it is to cultivate a minimalist mindset.

Adaptability

Adaptability can cover a range of valuable skills. Technical communicators need to have a combination of curiosity, willingness to do research, and the ability to turn information into concise, readable content. Add to that the constant drive to poke at things, to find out how they work, and to improve them where we can. I think of this bundle of qualities as restless dissatisfaction. Restless dissatisfaction leads us toward action, but it's the willingness and ability to adapt that turns our research into reality. It's easy to research new options, but we must be willing to accept and implement new tools and processes.

We're used to adapting to sudden changes on a small scale. Just think of all of the times someone has come to you with last-minute changes to a product. We learn to expect content changes and accept them with good humor.

That's an example of a small-scale change (product features), but this adaptability serves us well on a larger scale as we face changing conditions. When I'm evaluating technical communication candidates, their skill with a particular tool is secondary to their willingness to learn new tools and processes. An expert who isn't willing to adapt and change becomes much less useful if I decide to switch tools.

Most of us will be using different tools in five years, maybe sooner. I've used at least a half dozen documentation tools during my career. I've moved from unstructured desktop publishing to structured authoring tools to wikis to WYSYWIG editors. I've loved some tools, and I've fought with others. Sometimes I've loved and hated a single tool multiple times in the same week.

We must be willing to accept and adapt to changes to keep ourselves relevant in a world of rapidly changing skills. By being willing to change, we will also continue to research new and better ways of creating technical documentation and delivering it in ways that best serve our customers.

The more things change—by definition—the more we need to stay adaptable.

Openness to Feedback

One of the technical communicator's most important core skills is the ability to welcome feedback, especially when our content is criticized. I'll be the first to admit that this is difficult. When I was writing that first guide, even knowing that I was a newbie and had everything to learn, reviewers' comments sent me through the five stages of grief:

> Denial: "What? That section is fine!"
> Anger: "How dare they insult me like that!"
> Bargaining: "Fine, I'll make *some* of the changes just to make them happy."
> Depression: "So many comments. I'm a terrible writer."
> Acceptance: "I guess those comments make sense. And that section really is confusing.…"

I'd like to say that I now accept all feedback with a smile. At least I have learned to move through those grief stages quickly. Although I still have an emotional attachment to what I write, I've learned to invest enough in my content to be motivated to make it awesome, and I've seen the value that good reviewers add.

The more things change, the more open we need to be to feedback.

Conclusion

These are the skills that I've learned during my career. Collaboration requires empathy and openness. We're able to create clear, minimalist content only after we've honed our writing ability. Our adaptability lets us navigate and accept changes, both the changes that we pursue and the ones that we can't always control.

These skills ensure that no matter what buzzwords find their way into our titles or what tools we're asked to use, we continue to create valuable content for our companies. These are the core skills that I've learned in the 20 years since I wrote my first quick reference guide. I couldn't have imagined the amount of change that would occur in our profession, but I'm grateful that the fundamental skills I learned then are the same skills I will be using for many years to come.

The more things change, the more all these things need to stay the same.

NEAL KAPLAN *is the technical communications manager at Ayasdi, a data analysis and machine-learning startup. He is responsible for product documentation, customer support, and training content. Neal has 20 years of experience as a technical communicator and has created many types of documentation for companies ranging from startups to multinationals. He blogs at* Customers and Content *(*http://customersandcontent.com*). Neal lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with his wife and two daughters.*

How I Followed the Money to Marketing While Staying True to Tech Comm

By KAREN RONNING-HALL

I DIDN'T LEAVE the field of technical communication willingly. As it turns out, I didn't leave it at all. I stretched its definition to fit the times.

In December 2001, I was downsized, voted off the island, given the heave-ho. The office was cold. Everyone had gone home for the night except my boss, the human-resources director, the janitor, and me. My boss, the VP of engineering, pushed a thick envelope across the desk toward me. I'd never seen a severance package before. He smiled, as if he'd given me a gift. I wanted to smack him. In retrospect, I should have thanked him. But at the time, as I walked out of the office into the drizzle and darkness, all I knew was that I'd joined the ranks of the unemployed.

Up to that point, my career had been on a satisfying upward journey. I had advanced from technical writer to director of technical communication, responsible for thirty employees. I had a coveted corner office on the top floor of a software firm in Portland, Oregon. I was passionate about technical communication. I had served as president in the local STC chapter. Most of all, I loved working with my smart, diverse group of tech-comm friends and colleagues.

What Next?

The dot-com bubble burst that year, and I'd been hit with its debris. Some high-tech companies had failed; others were barely surviving. The tragedy of 9/11 had pushed the economy over the edge, and unemployment in the United States jumped higher than we'd seen in a decade.

Technical writers were hit especially hard. The Internet enabled many companies to offshore and outsource parts of product development, including technical communications. Disruptive technologies within our industry, like content-management and single-sourcing systems, were streamlining the way our jobs got done. Corporations wanted technical-publications departments to work faster and produce more with fewer writers, a theme that continues today.

I had a lot of company in the unemployment line. Technical-writing jobs were scarce. STC chapter meetings were downright depressing. Many of us were asking, "What's next? Will tech comm survive?"

Our Skills Transfer Somewhere, Right?

After getting over the shock of losing my job, I felt optimistic, even excited, for my colleagues and for myself. I knew that our basic skillset as technical communicators—writing, editing, and research—were essential skills at every company.

Finding a newer, better gig required stripping off the old labels and repackaging these fundamentals. We needed to stop narrowly defining ourselves as technical writers, stop seeing ourselves only in certain roles within product development—roles that upper management wanted to eliminate. We needed to discover the people in our companies who could recognize, appreciate, and use (read "pay for") our skillset for the good of our organizations. Who would those people be? And how should we reach out to them? What would those future tech-comm roles look like? I got an inkling about that future by looking to my past.

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During the 1990s, I was a tech-comm manager for a high-tech manufacturing company. My team was moved from one department to the next as upper management struggled to figure out where we fit. While some writers felt the changes were unsettling, I appreciated getting a glimpse of the way each department operated. We did a stint in the training department. A few years later, we moved to engineering, closer to our beloved subject matter experts (SMEs). The engineers got our jokes, and we were happy and productive. Unfortunately, the engineering manager thought that a good instructional guide could be written on a napkin. Money was tight in engineering, especially for product documentation. Finally, we landed in marketing as a result of a political grab by a new marketing communications (marcom) director. Initially, working with marketing folks—spin doctors, we called them—felt awkward and annoying, like wearing high heels on a beach. As long as their partying didn't distract my SMEs and writers, we coexisted amicably.

Over time, I warmed up to the spin doctors. They smiled a lot, which helped. In addition to their upbeat attitudes, here's what I liked:

- Marketing had more budget for writing projects than any other department because getting leads and influencing customers to buy is vital to corporate survival.
- The marketing director understood the value of good writing skills for creating a superior customer experience.
- Marketing offered new and varied types of writing opportunities for the technical writers in my group—including me.

In 2001, as many technical-writing jobs were sent overseas or eliminated, writing opportunities in marketing remained steady and paid better. Three months after getting booted from the software company, I strapped on my high heels and joined the spin doctors. I bought a laptop and rebranded myself as a freelance copywriter and marketing project manager specializing in technical content. My husband and I incorporated a marketing communications company, Kaia Communications. In our first year, we turned a profit, and we have continued to do so every year since.

Technical Content Becomes Marketing Content

Over the last 13 years of running this company, I've seen significant growth in opportunities in marketing for technical communicators. Good writing and editing skills are more important than ever as companies' content—especially technical content—exerts increasing influence on consumers' buying decisions.

Why is well-written content so important to companies? Buyers today complete from 60 to 90 percent of their

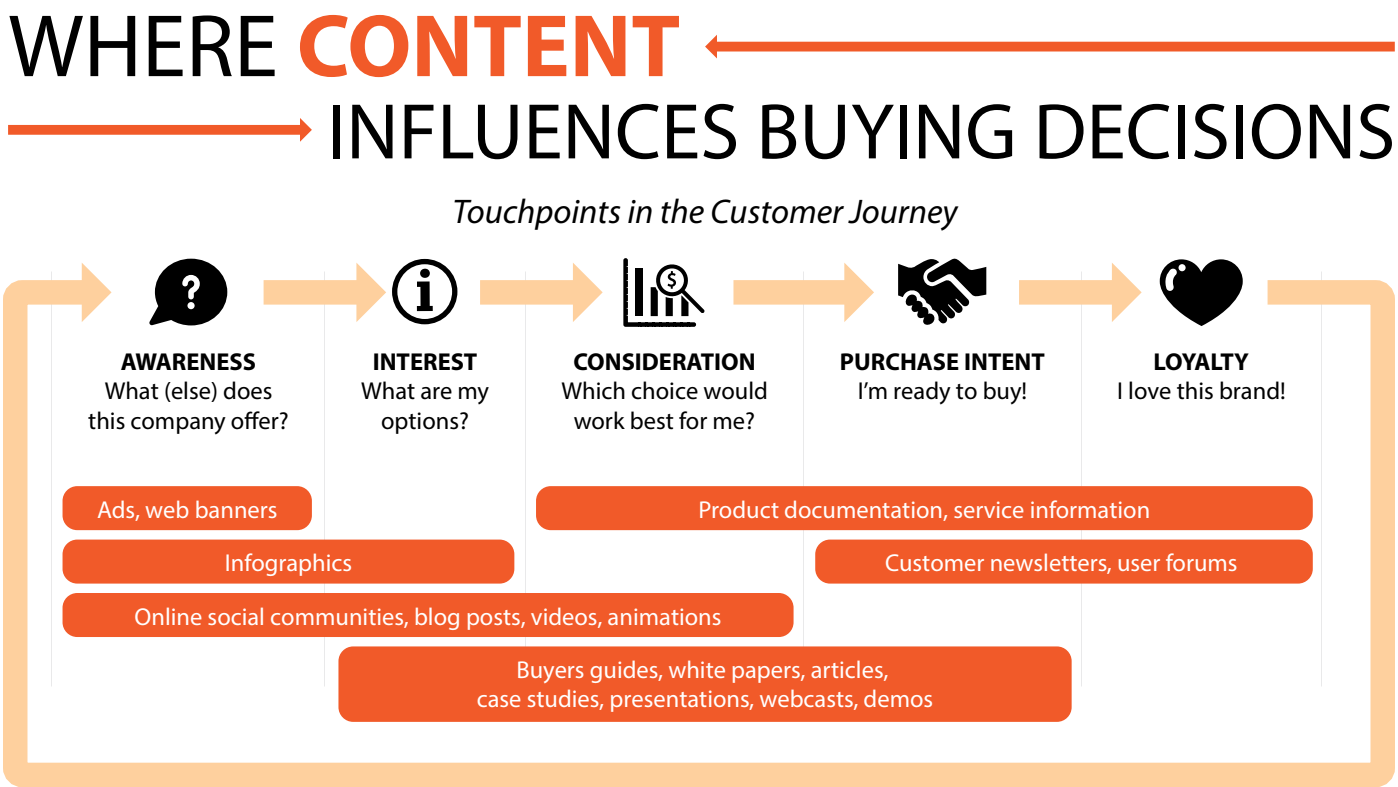

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Figure 1. Technical content has become marketing content. Whether by serendipity or by searching, people may encounter any kind of content at any touchpoint in the customer journey. All of it has the potential to influence buying decisions. As exemplified in these orange bars, easy access to corporate information has blurred distinctions between presale and postsale deliverables.

buying decisions before they engage with a vendor according to Forrester Research (*http://blogs.forrester.com/lori_wizdo/12-10-04-buyer_behavior_helps_b2b_marketers_guide_the_buyers_journey*). Until people make their decision to buy, they inform themselves using websites and social channels. Even when they attend physical events, they evaluate products and solutions on their smartphones and tablets. They avoid salespeople until they are ready.

Content influences consumers' impressions of a company throughout what marketers call the customer journey (see Figure 1). At every touchpoint—not just after a sale—what buyers want is what technical writers have specialized in all along: useful, authentic, relevant, accurate information that solves problems. Not fluff. Not spin. According to a 2013 survey by IBM, almost 89 percent of visitors to IBM's website for technical product information reported that high-quality technical content was either "important" or "very important" to their initial purchase decision (IBM Survey, *Intercom*, May 2013, *http://intercom.stc.org/2013/05/telling-the-right-story-proving-the-business-value-of-content*).

Technical content has an impact on a company's bottom line. That's something a CEO can get excited about. So can you as a technical writer because you can express your value in terms that executives appreciate.

Opportunities Explode in Content Marketing

Today's marketers need technical communicators to help them connect with their prospects and customers throughout the buying cycle, not just after the sale. Hubspot estimates that 60 percent of businesses employ content marketing—the creation, publishing, and sharing of content to acquire and retain customers—as part of their overall marketing strategy. Effective content marketers know that they need to develop different types of content for each stage of the customer journey, supplying the right information at the right time to help customers make choices they'll be happy with. A 2014 study by the Content Marketing Institute found that business marketers face the following top three challenges: lack of time, inability to produce enough content, and inability to produce the kind of content that engages (*http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2014/02/small-business-2014-content-marketing-research*).

Hear the call to action?

At many companies, including my own, technical writers already create many of the deliverables that content marketers are looking for: blog posts, Web pages, white papers, videos, infographics, presentations, social content, and traditional documentation, such as user guides and maintenance manuals. In my experience serving high-tech clients, one of the biggest challenges is generating enough content to support the customer journey at each stage of the buying cycle. This content gap—the gap between available content and needed content—represents opportunity for those technical communicators who gain skills in developing a broad range of content types.

Mingling with Marketing

You'll do well creating technical marketing content if you excel in the basics:

- clear, precise writing and editing
- strong research skills
- an ability to analyze an audience and deliver useful content when it's needed

With marketing content, you can introduce emotion, jazz, and sizzle into your prose to motivate your audience to take the next step. Of course, the sizzle must be audience appropriate. For example, my IT engineering audiences love charts and tables that would bore a less technical audience into a coma. The key is to understand the audience's challenges and craft content that inspires them to engage.

You also have an advantage in your career if you can think beyond a specific deliverable. Every content piece is part of a larger set of assets that work together to support the customer's business goals. Content developers who understand this bigger picture can write strategically to leverage content across multiple media. For example, at Kaia Communications, when we create a white paper, we may create a companion blog post, tweets, and infographics to amplify the key messages across a broader audience. This approach saves our clients time and money, helping them reach their prospects and clients faster.

Even if you aren't interested in becoming a marketer, consider developing a relationship with your marketing counterparts, who may not yet appreciate the influence that your valuable content has on buying decisions. Conversely, the marketing group may be able to help you better understand your audience with insightful market research or customer personas—information to help you improve your materials.

Conclusion

Like many of you, I started my journey as a writer of technical documentation. In a mid-career crisis, I rebranded myself and followed the money into marketing. I've seen the prospects for technical communicators continue to grow as information becomes more and more valued as a corporate asset. Excellent writing and editing skills are more important than ever as companies' content deliverables increasingly influence the buying decisions of consumers.

Collaboration between marketers and technical communicators improves information assets, thereby improving the customer experience. Happy customers mean higher revenues. Higher revenues mean happier executives. And happier executives mean expanded career opportunities for all.

KAREN RONNING-HALL *is the president of Kaia Communications, Inc., an agency that specializes in helping high-tech organizations reach larger audiences for their ideas, products, and services. Read her blog posts on* www.kaiacomm.com. *Follow Karen on Twitter* @karenronning.

Writing for Translation

Even If Your Company Does Not Translate

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By VAL SWISHER

WRITING FOR TRANSLATION is a topic that I speak about, write about, and shout about. I believe that making sure your content is understood by all your audiences, in their languages, is tantamount to doing good business. Writers whose companies don't translate may think I'm not talking to them, but I am.

In this article, I explain why you need to care about translation—at least translatability—even if your company doesn't pay a translation company for their services (see Figure 1), and I provide some best practices that you can easily put into place today.

Content Has Become Less Translatable

Over the years that I've been in the content creation business, I've seen a significant shift in the words that we use. In essence, we have changed our relationship with readers.

Twenty years ago, most technical documentation was written in the third person. For example, "The user puts the diskette into the disk drive." Technical content was stuffy, at least by today's standards. It was formal. We often used numbered headings: section 1, section 1.1, section 1.2, and so on.

Back then, technical writing tended to be scientific, rich in nouns, and grammatically accurate. These factors made the text fairly straightforward to understand and translate.

Fast-forward 10 years. Our relationship with our reader had become friendlier. *The user* became *you*: "Read these instructions if they are important to you." Our tone shifted from stuffy to familiar. We started to use more idioms and jargon. The translation process became more cumbersome and more prone to error when translators had to interpret the author's intent. With scientific language, the intent is usually obvious. With colloquial language, the intent isn't always clear.

Today's writing is vastly different from 20 years ago. Today, we are not just friendly with our reader, we want to sound like pals. Our writing has become increasingly colloquial and idiomatic—chummy—sometimes to the point of confusing some portion of the audience.

Examples abound. Consider the fitness-bracelet company that created a smartphone app to accompany the bracelet. Among the messages the reader might see was "Rise and shine!" This phrase makes sense if you are from the United States and have a good command of English. It makes no sense in many other cultures and languages. It doesn't translate. A more straightforward phrase, like "It's time to wake up," would have worked for more people.

Another example comes from the gaming industry. Gaming companies frequently call me because they are struggling with translating their characters and interfaces. One company told me that their characters needed to be "cheeky" in their voice and tone. Cheeky? Cheeky is all about jargon. Cheeky is your pal. And, unfortunately, cheeky does not translate.

I have seen this trend happening in technical communication. As the line between technical and marketing content blurs, we are faced with what I call the "friendly trend." And, just like cheeky, friendly can be hard to translate.

Three Reasons to Make Your Content Global-Ready
Even If You Don't Translate
1
We Don't Read Well
According to Harvard University, 27 million American adults cannot read a simple pamphlet.
2
English Is a Second Language
According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2011, 21% of the U.S. population ages 5 years and older spoke a language other than English in their home.
3
Customers Translate Anyway
According to Google, more than 200 million people use Google Translate monthly.

Figure 1. Three reasons to make your content global-ready (translatable).

Many Americans Don't Read Well

Any content that is difficult to translate is also difficult to read in English. Here's why: according to Harvard University, 27 million American adults cannot read a simple pamphlet (*www.hsph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/135/2012/09/doakchap1-4.pdf*). In fact, 40 to 44 million adults are at the lowest levels of literacy. This means they can read only extremely simple information. The average reading level in the United States is most frequently quoted at sixth or eighth grade. Yet, we continue to create content that is well above the national average.

Technical writers usually think that their reader is smarter than the national average. However, this is not necessarily the case. After all, it is a national *average*. By making your content clear and concise—in other words, translatable—you help reach the average readers among your customers.

Many Americans Have English as a Second Language (ESL)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2011, 21 percent of the U.S. population ages five and older spoke a language other than English in their home. That's 60.6 million people, or one in every five. In fact, 7 percent of people

who speak another language at home do not speak English at all. Another 15.4 percent report that they speak English "not well" (see Figure 2 for a breakdown by population group). Clearly, not everyone in the United States speaks English, particularly as a first language.

The population of nonnative English speakers in the United States is growing. These people are undoubtedly part of your customer base, or they will be. For this reason, you must make sure that your English content is easy to read for everyone, including nonnative readers.

Your Customers Are Translating Your Content Anyway

You may think that because your company doesn't pay a translation company for translation your content isn't being translated. You are almost certainly wrong. Chances are, your content is being translated. Just not by you, and not in a professional manner.

Google Translate and Bing Translate provide a free and convenient way of translating content, right on your Web page. When you provide English-only content to readers who don't speak English as their first language (or at all), they probably run your content through a free machine translation (MT) engine. The problem with relying on free MT is that you have no control over the translation and its accuracy. Once put through free MT, the content is out of your hands. Who knows what your instructions tell your non-English reader to do?

Machine translation operates using the "garbage in, garbage out" paradigm. When a machine translates nonoptimized content—content that was written without translation issues in mind—what comes out is anybody's guess. On the other hand, when a machine translates clear, concise, translation-optimized content, readers have a better chance of getting an accurate translation. The translation will still be imperfect, but cleaner source yields better translation results.

Cleaner in, cleaner out.

How Can You Optimize Your Writing Starting Today?

There are plenty of things that you can do to make your content easier to read, cheaper to translate, and faster to market. I can't address them all here, but I can pass on a few that you can start doing immediately.

Write Shorter Sentences

If you do only one thing to make your content global-ready, let it be this: shorten sentences. Long sentences can be difficult to understand in the original language and even more difficult to translate. While any sentence-length guideline is somewhat arbitrary, and while long sentences are sometimes warranted, many businesses find a limit helpful. Here's a common recommendation: if you use human translators, limit your sentences to 26 words. If you use machine translation, keep sentences to 24 words.

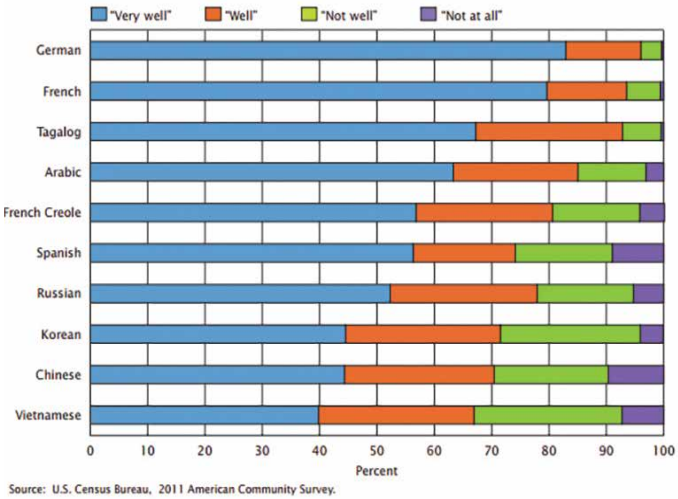

Figure 2. English-speaking ability as self-reported by the top 10 non-English-speaking populations in the United States. This information was gathered from people ages five and older who spoke a language other than English at home.

In case you wonder what a sentence of this length looks like, this sentence that you are reading right now contains exactly 24 words.

Write Less Content

When it comes to localization, keep not just your sentences but also your content in general as short as possible. Translation companies charge by the word. To make your content less expensive to translate, remove all needless words. A needless word is any word that does not affect the meaning of the sentence. Examples:

- *This software is very easy to install.* (Cut *very.*)
- *First, create a new form.* (Cut *new.*)

Another place to trim your copy is to substitute single, simple words for phrases. Example:

- *Our software works on a variety of platforms.* (Replace *a variety of* with *various.*)

When writers eliminate needless words, readers have an easier time understanding the content.

Say the Same Thing, the Same Way, Every Time

When I was growing up, I was taught to be creative when I wrote. Even in science reports (the equivalent of technical writing for a nine year old), the rule was, never say the same thing the same way twice. Always use different words, and use a lot of words. Using a lot of words shows off your vocabulary. I think that many of the writers I know took these instructions to heart, too.

This approach may make sense for some kinds of writing, but when you create business content for a global marketplace, you need to say the same thing, the same way, every time you say it. Here's why:

- Variation is expensive.
- Variation is confusing.
- Variation is time-consuming.

- Variation is annoying.

Consistent writing has additional positive effects:

- It's easier to read.
- It tells the same story.
- It lends itself to easier reuse.
- It facilitates structured authoring.
- It's easier to update.

There Is No Magic Bullet

Idioms, jargon, and clichés sneak into our writing without us even noticing. Here are a few examples:

- Due diligence
- Bang for the buck
- Fine tune
- Back to the drawing board
- Pros and cons

Eliminate idioms and jargon when you are making your content clear and concise. It takes practice.

Use Consistent Terminology

Consistent terminology is critical for many reasons:

- It makes your content much easier to read for people of all reading levels.
- It preserves your company trademarks, service marks, copyrights, and so on.
- It safeguards your product and company branding.
- It ensures that everyone in your organization uses the same words to describe the same things.
- It allows you to use different XML chunks in a structured environment without having to rewrite for consistency.
- It reduces the price and the amount of time it takes to translate the content into multiple languages.
- It helps ensure the quality and consistency of the translations.

Make sure that you and your colleagues use the same terminology in a consistent way.

Grammar Counts

Some people act as if grammar no longer matters. At least, they speak that way. But grammar is important. Here are a few examples:

- Fewer vs. less: *The situation of young people with less opportunities concerns many American cities.* (Should be *fewer opportunities.*)
- Passive vs. active voice: *Emails are blocked by the mail server.* (Active: *The mail server blocked the emails.*)
- Nouns followed by an "-ing" verb: *Go to the folder containing the files that you want to include in the group.* (Better: *Go to the folder that contains the files…*)

In order to make your content as readable as it can be, watch your grammar.

Summary

Whether or not your company pays for professional translation, creating global-ready content is important for everyone. When you write for translation, your content ends up being easier to understand in all languages, including English. This is important for people who have an average U.S. reading level or who have English as a second language.

Your international readers and many of your ESL readers are going to translate your content, even if you do not. That means your content will be run through free machine translation engines, such as Google Translate or Bing Translate. Free MT engines are typically unreliable. By optimizing your English content first, the quality of the translation is likely to be better.

It's not difficult to write global-ready content. By following the guidelines in this article, you can easily make a difference in your outcome.

And yes, I'm talking to you.

VAL SWISHER, *CEO of Content Rules, is an expert in global content strategy, content development, and terminology management. Val helps companies solve complex content problems by analyzing their content and the way it is created. Val thinks that content should be easy to read, cost-effective to translate, and efficient to manage. Her customers include industry giants Google, Cisco, Illumina, Facebook, and Rockwell Automation. Her third book,* Global Content Strategy: A Primer*, was recently published by XMLPress. When not working with customers, Val can be found sitting behind her sewing machine working on her latest quilt. She also makes a mean hummus.*

ASD Simplified Technical English (STE) term checker

STE helps to make instructions as clear as possible. But, STE has many grammar rules and thousands of dictionary rules.

To remember all the rules is difficult. Can you remember the approval status of the word *fluid*?*

- Not approved
- Approved as a noun
- Approved as an adjective
- Approved as a noun and as an adjective.

Can you remember your organization's technical terms and the unapproved alternatives?

The STE term checker from TechScribe helps you to make sure that your text conforms to STE.

Free trial: www.simplified-english.co.uk

* *Fluid* is approved as a noun only, unlike *liquid*, which is approved as a noun and as an adjective.

Techscribe®

Training-Video Scripts: Whose Lines Are They, Anyway?

By LI-AT RATHBUN |
Senior Member

IT'S COMING; WE all know it's coming—the day we'll be asked to help make training videos. And if our company (or client) produces training videos, that day can't come too soon. Why? Because we're the writing experts. Because, as with any deliverable, the wording is tighter, clearer, and more organized when we're involved. As the writing experts, we know how to adjust the message to match the situation.

So let's all take a collective deep breath and remember: videos are just another channel for doing what we already do best—connecting users with the information they need to successfully complete tasks. Right? No sweat!

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Some aspects of creating a training video are more overwhelming than others to those who prefer to remain behind the scenes. For one thing, we may feel uncomfortable at the prospect of having our voices recorded. But helping with videos doesn't necessarily mean we'll be the "on-air talent." It seems that for every tech writer who wants to run as far away from the microphone as possible, there are several SMEs (subject-matter experts) who are eager for an opportunity at stardom via the company training video. So don't get hung up on this point.

Our greatest contribution is in creating the script. We may also be involved with generating screen captures (also known as *screencasts*), recording or cleaning up audio, and even making the training video itself. But, at a minimum, we should participate in the scriptwriting process.

Data Gathering

Your data-gathering process will vary depending on the sort of SME you have at your disposal. You might conduct a traditional SME interview or gather information from the product documentation. Or perhaps you'll use a hybrid of these. If you have access to the product trainer, it might make sense to record a training session as background material. That way, you can capture the training flow and nuances of how to perform the tasks.

Scriptwriting

No matter how you collect your source information, the video content and video creation will flow most smoothly if there's a script. We can shy away from recording the audio, respectfully declining the limelight, but the script is our domain. (If your company produces videos but does not ask for your help, you may need to remind them of your expertise.)

The company's professionalism is at stake, and it may not take long for viewers to notice our absence.

Script Format

You can write your script in whatever format works for you, particularly if you'll be the one recording the audio. But it's a good idea to create a video-script style guide and a template. This will establish a consistent format and process, which will enhance uniformity across video projects as well as facilitate communication with SMEs, script approvers, and anyone else involved. The style guide is simply a legend, where you designate different colors for different aspects of your script—such as draft comments, questions for the reviewer, and actions that coincide with the script (see Figure 1). Of course, by the time you have a final script, the draft comments and questions will be resolved.

Transcript

Some projects include a transcript next to the video, for users who must rely on the written word or use it to enhance their comprehension. If your project will include a transcript, you can strip out internal comments, or even add elements to it. For example, in a training video, I may say, "Tom Johnson shares some great scriptwriting tips in his blog." I would not need to say the URL for the blog because viewers could see within the video the blog that I refer to. But if I published the transcript, I would add the URL there. So I would include this color-coded note in the script: (include just in the transcript: *http://idratherbewriting.com/category/video-tutorials/*).

Step 5 in Figure 1 shows what the script looks like for this video segment. The light blue font in italics is the action on the screen; the pink font is the URL note for the transcript. Figure 2 shows what this same step looks like in the transcript. All that appears in the transcript is the narration from step 5, plus the URL from the pink note.

Step
Action on Screen
Narration
1
Title page
Start audio at 0'2"
It's coming; we all know it's coming—the day you'll be asked to help make training videos.
5
Scroll to fifth article, slowly enough to show article titles
(include just in the transcript: http://idratherbewriting.com/category/video-tutorials/)
Tom Johnson shares some great script-writing tips in his blog.

Figure 1. Comment in pink, instructing the transcript writer to add the URL.

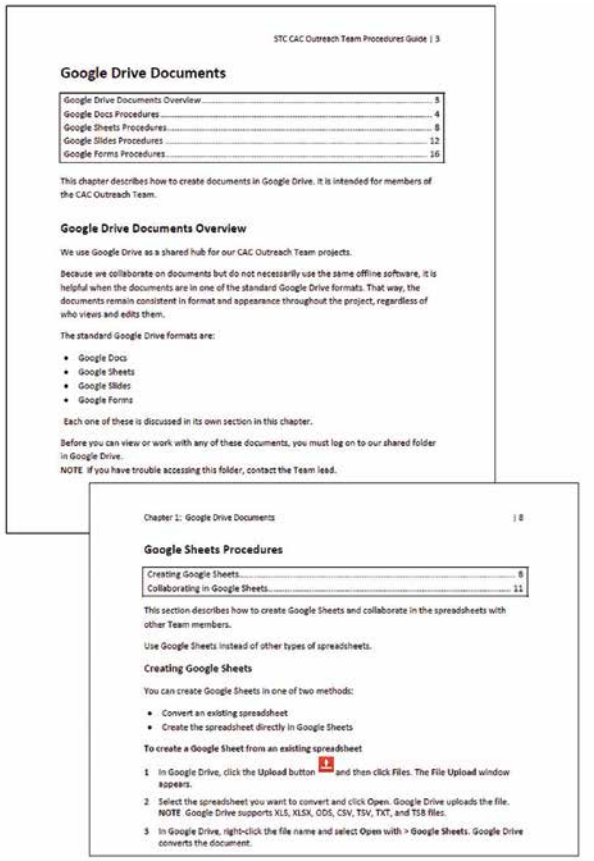
Tom Johnson shares some great script-writing tips in his blog (http://idratherbewriting.com/category/video-tutorials/).

Figure 2. Transcript showing video narration plus a URL added.

Example of Message Shifting to Adjust to the Medium: Procedures Guide vs. Script

The main thing for us , as the writing experts, to remember is that scriptwriting is not a new, foreign skill. We are simply adjusting the message to the medium—which, in this case, may be new.

Figures 3 and 4 serve as examples of what the same message to the same audience might look like in two media—one read, the other watched and listened to. Both figures lead to a procedure for creating Google Sheets by converting an existing spreadsheet. The information is the same, but the way the user will encounter and receive the information varies.



STC CAC Outreach Team Procedures Guide | 3

Google Drive Documents

Google Drive Documents Overview 3
Google Docs Procedures 4
Google Sheets Procedures 8
Google Slides Procedures 12
Google Forms Procedures 16

This chapter describes how to create documents in Google Drive. It is intended for members of the CAC Outreach Team.

Google Drive Documents Overview

We use Google Drive as a shared hub for our CAC Outreach Team projects.

Because we collaborate on documents but do not necessarily use the same offline software, it is helpful when the documents are in one of the standard Google Drive formats. That way, the documents remain consistent in format and appearance throughout the project, regardless of who views and edits them.

The standard Google Drive formats are:

- Google Docs
- Google Sheets
- Google Slides
- Google Forms

Each one of these is discussed in its own section in this chapter.

Before you can view or work with any of these documents, you must log on to our shared folder in Google Drive.
NOTE If you have trouble accessing this folder, contact the Team lead.

Chapter 1: Google Drive Documents | 8

Google Sheets Procedures

Creating Google Sheets 8
Collaborating in Google Sheets 11

This section describes how to create Google Sheets and collaborate in the spreadsheets with other Team members.

Use Google Sheets instead of other types of spreadsheets.

Creating Google Sheets

You can create Google Sheets in one of two methods:

- Convert an existing spreadsheet
- Create the spreadsheet directly in Google Sheets

To create a Google Sheet from an existing spreadsheet

1 In Google Drive, click the Upload button and then click Files. The File Upload window appears.
2 Select the spreadsheet you want to convert and click Open. Google Drive uploads the file.
NOTE Google Drive supports XLS, XLSX, ODS, CSV, TSV, TXT, and TSB files.
3 In Google Drive, right-click the file name and select Open with > Google Sheets. Google Drive converts the document.

Figure 3. Procedures guide about creating Google Sheets. Compared with a script, the tone is more formal. It is inviting, professional, but nonconversational. Users encounter this static information linearly, at their own pace.

Ready, Set, Write!

Now that we've established that video scripts are just another writing assignment, and that we are the ones to write them, here are some basic things to think about when creating the script:

- **Video Length:** The ideal video length is around three minutes; two minutes is great and four minutes is okay. You'll likely lose the viewer if you go much longer than that. If you need to cover a lot of information, parse it into a series of videos.
- **Words-to-Video Length Ratio:** One minute of video is equal to about 100 words. This is a good reminder for SMEs who want to include too many details in the script, and a good argument for why a script is needed in the first place (so that we can succinctly say just what we mean).
- **Meaning through Movement:** The action on the screen will help replace some of the words needed when describing a static graphic. So you can get a lot of detail into 100 words.
- **Tone:** The wording should be conversational but still professional. As with any professional messaging, avoid condescension and being too informal.

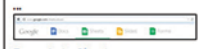
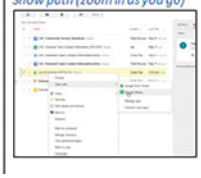
Step	Action on Screen	Narration
1	*Title page* *Start audio at 0'2"*	We use Google Drive as a shared hub for our CAC Outreach Team projects.
2	 *Zoom in to Sheets.*	Because we collaborate on documents but don't necessarily use the same offline software, it's helpful when our documents are Google docs. In this video, we'll demonstrate how to create a Google spreadsheet, also known as Google Sheets.
3		There are two ways to create Google Sheets. The first way is to upload and open an existing document, and then convert it.
4	*Show files Google Drive supports*	You can do this with a variety of files in Google Drive.
5	*Show Upload process* *[NOTE Need to recreate proper screencast for this step]* 	If the file isn't in your Google Drive yet, simply click the **Upload** button, navigate to that file on your local device, and click **Open**.
6	*Show path (zoom in as you go)* 	We already have an existing Excel spreadsheet, so we'll use that for the rest of our example.

Figure 4. Script for a video about creating Google Sheets. Compared with a procedures guide, the tone is less formal. It is inviting, professional, and conversational. Users encounter this dynamic information at the pace set by the video creators.

Conclusion: Why Writers Matter in Training-Video Projects

There will be times when the video project proceeds without us. After all, "Anyone can write." Right? We've heard this before. Now we face a medium that, for many of us and those we work with, constitutes a new frontier.

But the company's professionalism is at stake, and it may not take long for viewers to notice our absence. Whether it's a "copywrite page" instead of a "copyright page," or the confusion viewers feel when the narrator switches between "you," "we," and "the user" within the same paragraph, or the unease viewers feel when the narrator gushes, "Wow! Wasn't that a cinch?"—sooner or later, we'll be missed.

So whose lines are these, anyway? If the aim is to deliver information in a clear, competent, and relatable way—the kind that makes the company (or client) look good—those lines are ours. Others can have the limelight, but we're the ones who can make them shine brightest!

LI-AT (RUTTENBERG) RATHBUN participated in eLearning back when it was called CBT (computer-based training). Although her current role at Yardi Systems is as technical editor, she's busy these days with initial-implementation training videos—a series that steps new clients through setup tasks that they can complete on their own, sparing them from hours on the phone with tech support. You can connect with Li-At on LinkedIn, Twitter (@virtual_li*), or email (*stc.liat@gmail.com*).*

How to Work with Your Editor

By AVON J. MURPHY | *Fellow*

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IF YOU'RE A TECHNICAL WRITER who has access to an editor's services, you can take steps to nurture your relationship with your editor. Regardless of whether you're beginning your career or have years of experience, here are a few pointers from an editor who's had the privilege of helping writers improve thousands of documents.

Remember the Big Picture

Let's begin with the principle that underlies the writer-editor relationship: we are colleagues who bring different skills into play as we strive to achieve a common goal. The technical writer researches technologies in depth, gives coherent shape to documents, and creates sentences and paragraphs that convey supporting details. The editor brings another perspective on the work in progress in the form of evaluation and recommendations. As different as our roles may be, we share responsibility for the success of our communications with our audience. We are collaborating.

If you're a writer just beginning to learn the trade, you've perhaps heard stories about people like me. Editors relish their role of punishing you, view you as an underling who must obey all editorial commands to meet production schedules, think they know more than you, and try to replace your thinking with theirs. If you're a seasoned pro, you've perhaps encountered an editor or two who indeed acted this way.

You might like to hear a professional secret: any editor who acts like that is a jerk. If I made your life impossible, I wouldn't be doing my job, I wouldn't deserve to edit your writing, and I wouldn't get much work. A good editor respects the technical writer's thoughts and contributions and, as a fellow professional and colleague, expects the same from the technical writer.

Maintain Communication

We can't achieve our goals if we don't communicate. I worked with an engineer who had been given his first technical lead position and was charged with delivering a substantial report on a new technology, for which I provided him a template. Clues of something wrong began popping up at once. My routine requests for updates and early research data were answered by silence, and the engineer was suddenly unavailable for consultation. I had no idea of what he was accomplishing or how to help him. His manager and I finally learned that he felt insecure about putting his thoughts into words and had done nothing beyond doing the research. A little communication from him now and then would have made our partnership successful.

A good editor makes sure you understand the scope of the project before we launch it, describing the schedule we need to observe, referring you to a style guide and other resources, letting you know whenever help is needed with the technical details, and providing specific feedback on what you submit. In turn, a good technical writer communicates with the editor whenever writing help is needed, when a subject matter expert provides new technical information that helps with the editing process, or when unforeseen circumstances make it impossible for you to meet a deadline.

Keep Your Expectations Realistic

An editor's response to your prose varies depending upon the type of editing being done at a given point in the project, the time available, the budget, the number of other clients the editor has, and other factors.

I most enjoy developmental editing, because here I can use my creativity in tandem with your creativity to come up with the optimal approach and structure. We usually begin with an outline and, after give and take, the technical writer sends me revisions of the outline as well as exploratory drafts. I usually ask lots of questions about strategy and overall order of sections, and I provide examples of revised outlines and document-wide recommendations. But you will see very few words about your mechanics at this point. What we're doing is laying a foundation upon which you can build the project.

Expect a different response when an editor copyedits your document. At this stage, we're putting our minds together to clarify meaning, to ensure that our readers have the best combination of words, pictures, and (sometimes) video to understand our message. You will get recommendations to change wording, insert new paragraphs and artwork, and delete or move passages, and I ask such questions as, "Can you explain this in simpler terms?" and "Does this phrasing do the job?" We're now working at the chapter, paragraph, and word level.

When proofreading, an editor checks for such mechanical production issues as widows and orphans or unintentional changes in font size. Your document is out of your hands by this point, so you won't get communication from me about further changes.

Deal Responsibly with Editorial Feedback

What should you do when you get your document back with comments and suggested changes? Begin by looking carefully at what the editor has done. If you don't understand something, let me know immediately. Once I've clarified my remarks, you can return to your work with added confidence.

One thing I don't want you to do is to ignore my comments! This has happened to me only once, and I don't relish the memory. I was the sole developmental editor and copyeditor for a skilled writer who was in turn the sole author on a new online documentation system. Although she clearly had learned the technology and could write, my experienced eyes noted several clusters of topics that were repetitive and an alarming number of paragraphs that violated company guidelines on acceptable phrasing. I don't know whether she even read my files. She informed me that she was the author and would not change a word. Our product manager would not accept the unrevised writing, and we made the changes without the writer's further input.

Up to a point, that author was right. The written product is essentially yours—you've generated the content, you've put a great deal of concentrated work into shaping your sentences, and your name usually appears on it. If I appear to be off-base in my interpretation or advice, by all means don't be afraid to hold your ground and show me why your wording will work better than mine, or possibly we can hammer out a third approach. This kind of give and take can be stimulating and often produces stronger writing than either of us originally envisaged. So yes, your writing is yours. It's also ours and, in some cases, it is proprietary to the company for which you work.

Needless to say, I expect you to do your homework before sending me drafts. The new version in my inbox should reflect your response to everything I noted in my earlier edited versions through your accepting and rejecting changes, answering my direct questions, posing questions of your own, and perhaps adding new material. Don't expect an editor to rewrite; this is your job. Also, if you've tapped into new research for your revision, please send links to the sources. Happily, nearly every professional writer I've worked with has rewarded me with improvements in our documents and has made my work easier.

A good editor respects the technical writer's thoughts and contributions and, as a fellow professional and colleague, expects the same from the technical writer.

Respect Deadlines

I'll talk about deadlines only briefly. I've been an editor for several technical book publishers and software firms, all of which maintain streamlined schedules to get accurate information to readers ahead of the competition. In these environments, if you don't respond to edits by the deadlines, the schedule slips for everyone down the line from indexers to production staff to the marketing department. The financial repercussions can be severe. As I've said earlier, always tell your editor early on if anything happens that might endanger meeting a deadline.

Work with the Team's Technology

Our partnership works best when you master two types of software tools. The first is the set of revision tracking features embedded within the software we're using to prepare and circulate documents. Microsoft Word, Google Docs, Apple Pages, Adobe Acrobat, and other applications make it easy for authors and editors to see each other's comments and textual alterations. An editor feels more at ease if the author has mastered the tracking features that we depend on to communicate our thinking about your prose. If you are a contractor or freelancer, know at least the procedures to follow in Word, which is used in most workplaces. You'll streamline our work on a file if, after we've agreed on all changes, you can prepare a clean version by finding and clicking the Show Markup button, selecting Comments and the other options to make all markup visible, reviewing the markup one last time, and finally accepting all changes and deleting all comments.

You also need to be aware of how we keep records for our projects. An editor may expect a technical writer to be able to enter data into a simple spreadsheet or a calendaring application, such as Google Calendar or Microsoft Outlook. You might also have to learn version control software, such as Visual SourceSafe. I've observed that technical writers quickly become familiar with such software on the job, so you should have no problem.

Help Your Editor Find True Happiness

I hope that each of us can experience a moment during our professional lives when every element coalesces in absolute perfection. It happened for me several years ago when I was developmental editor and copyeditor for the sole writer of print documentation for a new operating system. The technical writer was a marvel to work with:

- We quickly negotiated and agreed to the conditions of our partnership, including daily email updates on our progress and turnaround times of no more than two days on all drafts, revisions, and editorial comments.
- She apprised me of her progress every day and responded quickly when I emailed her questions.
- At our weekly face-to-face meetings, she not only elaborated on responses to my comments but also brought up areas for discussion that I hadn't thought of.
- Her revisions were always in my inbox well before her deadlines.
- At the end of our contract, she thanked me for making her a better writer. She likewise made me a better editor by challenging me to write editorial comments that were easy to understand, taking a deep interest in the reasoning behind my editorial decisions, and increasing my confidence that a writer could indeed learn from my editing.

I thought I'd died and gone to editorial heaven! Of course, not every writer-editor relationship works out this well, but we can always strive to make it happen. As long as you and I do our parts, we just might get there.

AVON J. MURPHY *(avonmu@comcast.net) is a technical editor in western Washington. A retired college professor and government writer, he is an STC Fellow, a contractor, and the principal in Murphy Editing and Writing Services, specializing in computer and Web technologies. Avon served as book review editor for* Technical Communication *for 17 years. His most recent book is* New Perspectives on Technical Editing *(2010).*

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How to Be Your Own Best Editor

By RICHARD HAMILTON | *Member*

I KNOW THE ARGUMENTS for using a professional editor. I've made them myself. *No one should edit his or her own work. Mistakes cost money. Customers will dismiss your product if your documents are poorly edited.* None of these arguments holds water with most managers. Few corporate tech comm groups have dedicated editors, and that's unlikely to change.

If you are one of the fortunate few who has an editor, treasure that person and don't let your manager see this article. If you aren't that fortunate, read on.

Successful self-editing requires action at every phase of your process, from planning to writing to editing. If you wait until you're through writing to think about editing, you'll waste time and effort, and the result will not be as good.

Planning Phase

From the day you start planning your writing project, you can take actions that will simplify your eventual editing efforts. The three keys to planning are selection, self-awareness, and structure.

Selection means you know your audience and write content for just that audience. Don't explain bits and bytes to experienced system administrators and don't explain the theory of computation to beginning programmers. Write only the content your audience needs. Because technical writers often want to explain a bit more, add interesting sidelights, and ensure that our audience gets the point, we tend to overwrite unless we plan carefully. Writing only what needs to be written reduces your editing load; you don't need to edit content you haven't written.

Self-awareness means you know your writing strengths and weaknesses and use that knowledge to write better content from the start so that you can later edit that content more efficiently. More on this topic later.

Structure gives you a framework that makes your content predictable and consistent. Predictable and consistent may not work in a novel, but they work in technical writing, both for your audience and for you. Even if you don't use structured markup, you can still structure your content so that each type of content—procedures, concepts, reference material—follows a consistent model. You'll simplify writing and editing.

Writing Phase

In the writing phase, the most important way to minimize your later edits is to start simple and stay simple. The simpler you write, the easier it will be to edit.

Which of these passages would you rather edit?

"The surrounding packing material should be retained so that in the event that you need to return the product you can use it for shipment."

"Keep the box in case you need to return the product."

If you're editing the second sentence, you will waste no time adding commas, pruning verbiage, chasing antecedents, simplifying words, or converting passive voice to active. And if your content is translated, the lower your word count, the less your company pays.

Editing Phase

In most technical communication groups, you aren't going to get much, if any, direct editing support. You will get a technical review and possibly an end-user review. Your best opportunity to get editing help is to engage fellow writers in some peer editing.

Technical and End-User Reviews

During technical reviews, you can't expect and don't want subject matter experts to edit your content for language usage. However, you should ask them to flag content they think may be hard to understand. If they have a hard time understanding what you've written, rewrite and try again. The same thing applies to end-user reviews if you are fortunate enough to have them.

Peer Editing

Peer editing means you collaborate with other writers to edit each other's work. If you don't have a peer-editing arrangement, start one. You may meet resistance. You may even resist yourself; after all, you and your fellow writers already have plenty to do. But peer editing doesn't need to take a lot of time. To get the most from peer editing for the least effort, try these two tactics:

Ask peer editors to mark problems but not fix them. A good writer can almost always fix a problem once that problem has been pointed out, so don't make your editors rewrite. They will work faster, and, as a bonus, you won't get into disagreements over whose wording is better.

Ask peer editors to help you find your blind spots. Don't ask any editor, especially a peer editor, to keep fixing the same problems over and over again. Instead, ask your editor to tell you about your blind spots, those grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes that you keep making but don't see. Every writer has blind spots. Some matter more than others. Here are some that I consider important to watch for:

- **Definitions:** Do you misuse words, especially commonly confused pairs such as *affect* and *effect*? For example, do you "effect a change" or "affect a change"? If you're not sure, open a tab in your browser, leave it pointed at a dictionary, and use it. If I'm even slightly unsure of the meaning of a word, I look it up.
- **Rewording:** Do you overuse synonyms? This leads to sentences such as, "Unpack the frimlitch and the plastic ties, then attach the product to the scrimlet using the fasteners." Are the fasteners the plastic ties or something else? Is the product the frimlitch? Your customers can guess, and they may get it right, but do you want them guessing when they're wrangling a delicate frimlitch? It's better to repeat a word than to replace it with a potentially ambiguous synonym.
- **Antecedents:** Do you have antecedent problems? For example, "When you insert the scrimlet in the socket, make sure it's well grounded." What's the *it* that should be grounded, the scrimlet or the socket? Don't leave your reader guessing, or something—we don't know what—may get zapped. Ambiguous antecedents can be hard for self-editors to notice because ambiguity is hard to identify in your own writing. To find antecedent problems, look at each pronoun and try to imagine everything it might refer to. If a pronoun could reasonably refer to more than one thing, you've found a problem.
- **Passive voice:** Do you overuse the passive voice? For example, "The frimlitch cleaning process is initiated by the scrimlet." Avoid passive voice when you can, but don't obsess. Sometimes you must use passive voice, and other times it works better than active voice. For example, "Senator Blowhard was elected with a margin of ten points" is shorter and clearer than "The voters elected Senator Blowhard with a margin of ten points." Generally, though, sentences in passive voice are likely to be unnecessarily long, complex, and challenging to edit. Learn to recognize passive voice, and when you use it, use it intentionally.
- **Word quirks:** Do you overuse certain words? This might include overusing words like *very* or using favored words in an ambiguous context. For example, if you favor the word *as*, you can end up with a sentence like "Turn off the red switch as the propeller moves." Does this mean "turn off the switch because the propeller moves," "turn off the switch when the propeller begins to move," or "turn off the switch only when the propeller is moving"? If you've ever spent any time around propellers, you don't want to guess. However, not all word quirks are equally bad. Most of the time it doesn't matter if you use "like" when you should use "such as," or if you overuse "that."
- **Repetition:** Do you repeat phrases unnecessarily? For example, "Unpack the frimlitch and save the packing material and instructions when you unpack the product." This is a lesser offense, but I see it all the time. Once you are aware of this blind spot, it's easy to find and fix.
- **Distance:** Do you leave too much distance between the verb and the subject, object, or prepositional phrase? For example, "Insert the frimlitch with the yellow side up and the purple side to the left carefully in the triangular socket." By the time they get to "in the triangular socket," your readers will have forgotten what the task is. And the strangely placed "carefully" doesn't help. This sentence isn't technically incorrect, but it is much harder to read than it could be. Try something like this instead: "Orient the frimlitch with the yellow side up and the purple side to the left, then carefully insert it into the triangular socket."
- **Complicated sentence structure:** Do you write sentences that are too long, have multiple dependent clauses, or use multiple parenthetical phrases? Does your writing contain a lot of semicolons, colons (except when introducing lists), dashes, parentheses, or commas? Heavy use of these punctuation marks is a sign that your style may be overly complex and, thus, harder to edit.

The better you understand your blind spots, the more problems you will catch and correct as you write, leaving yourself fewer edits to make later.

Self-Editing

Peer editing is good when you get it, but since peer editors are usually as busy as you are, the odds are you won't get a thorough edit. You will need to self-edit. Here are some ideas for getting the most out of self-editing:

- **Start with selection.** Is everything there, and is it pitched at the right audience? What can you remove before you start editing?
- **Look for your blind spots.** Even if you catch a lot of problems as you write, you will still miss problems in your blind spots. Keep them in mind as you edit.
- **Use a checklist.** A checklist helps you focus on what's important and keeps you from missing steps. Make your personal checklist by combining universal ideas (like selection and peer edits) with specific checks tailored to your company requirements, your style guide, and your writing blind spots.
- **Don't tweak, rewrite.** When you find yourself spending 10-15 minutes trying to fix a sentence, stop. Set it aside, then come back later and rewrite it from scratch. There's probably something fundamentally wrong that you don't see. Instead of diving deeper into a series of tweaks, rewrite. In extreme cases, you may need to back up and redo a paragraph or even more. Even then, it's often better, and quicker, to drop a losing cause and start anew.
- **Use a different format.** Print it out or display it in HTML on a wide screen, anything that puts it in a different form. You will see things you didn't see in the original form.
- **Let it sit for a while.** This is hard when you're on deadline, but if you can leave a project for a while, when you come back you will see your work from a fresh perspective that can reveal problems you didn't see before. Set one project aside, work on another, then come back to the first. Sleep on it. Eat lunch (while reading a good book, of course).
- **Read it aloud.** If you can, read your text to someone else, or read it aloud to yourself. Like using a different format and letting your writing sit for a while, reading aloud gives you a different perspective that will help reveal problems.
- **Read it backwards.** An old proofreading trick, this technique especially helps with spelling, repeated words (*the the*), and homophones (*to, two, too*).

Let's apply some selection to the editing process. What rules or conventions have lower priority? Don't take this list as an excuse to ignore these things in most writing. But when you are under the gun and you have limited time to edit, here are some things that, in my opinion, could be given lower priority.

- **Paragraphs:** Don't use too many very short or very long paragraphs, especially in a row. Otherwise, don't worry too much about paragraph breaks unless a trusted editor says you've got a problem.
- **Archaic rules:** To scrupulously avoid split infinitives is a waste of time. And starting a sentence with a conjunction is fine, as is ending a sentence with a preposition if you want to.
- **Strict parallel construction:** If your writing is unambiguous, accurate, and you sometimes use nonparallel phrasing, the world will not end. Parallel structure is good, but if you don't have time to fix a clear, nonparallel sentence, such as the previous one, don't let it keep you up at night.
- **Commas, sometimes:** My first college English paper came back with an F and the note, "You write well, but you have no idea how to use commas." Since then, I have been inordinately sensitive to comma usage. Don't go down that road. Learn the important rules, and don't worry about the ones that are "case by case." The important ones are the ones that remove ambiguity. In my opinion, those include the Oxford comma and commas that separate an independent clause from a dependent clause. If you read your text carefully, and a comma doesn't cause confusion, I wouldn't worry about keeping it, or dropping it. For example, I think the previous sentence would be unambiguous with or without the first or third commas. I can see arguments for keeping or removing both.
- **Widows, orphans, line breaks, and formatting in general:** If you're trying to install a frimlitch, you don't care if the word "install" is hyphenated in the wrong place at the end of a line. Some writers are forced to deal with formatting, but with the exception of space-constrained documents such as quick reference cards or checklists, the details of typography and formatting have value, but edits that improve clarity have higher priority.

Conclusion

What does my advice boil down to? Carefully select what to write and what to leave out, learn where your blind spots are, create and use a checklist, get a fresh perspective whenever you can, and don't sweat the small stuff.

Several of the points in this article came from a discussion on the *TechWhirl* mailing list (*www.techwr-l.com/*), especially the thoughts on using checklists and enlisting technical reviewers. Thanks to everyone who contributed. And thanks to Marcia Riefer Johnston, whose help editing this article is ample proof to me that good editors are priceless.

RICHARD HAMILTON *is the founder of XML Press, which creates publications for technical communicators, content strategists, content marketers, and engineers. Before starting XML Press in 2008, he worked in the computer industry as a software developer and documentation manager. Richard volunteers with the Tzu Chi Foundation, an international humanitarian organization. In his spare time, he enjoys playing the guitar and, occasionally, singing.*

Review of MadCap Lingo 9

By PETER ARGONDIZZO

I ALWAYS GET VERY EXCITED about updates to MadCap-Software's translation product MadCap Lingo. We have been using the product for years and each update has provided time-saving benefits and ease-of-use improvements. Release 9 is no exception to this rule!

I thought it might be best to review the product by working through building a project and looking at the different updates against the list MadCap provides on their website.

Multilingual Project Support!

Yes, I used an exclamation point on the first feature. This added feature is a huge time-saver. Lingo can now create a multilingual project with just a few extra clicks. In previous builds you had to create a separate Lingo project for each language. Setting up a 15 language project now takes minutes vs. a few hours in previous builds. Thank you, MadCap.

When creating the translation bundle or the files you send out for translation, you can pick and choose your languages to generate, include the translation memory and even terminology databases with just a few clicks. You can also add or eliminate languages from a project at any time without having to recreate the entire project. In my opinion, this one option alone makes the upgrade worthwhile.

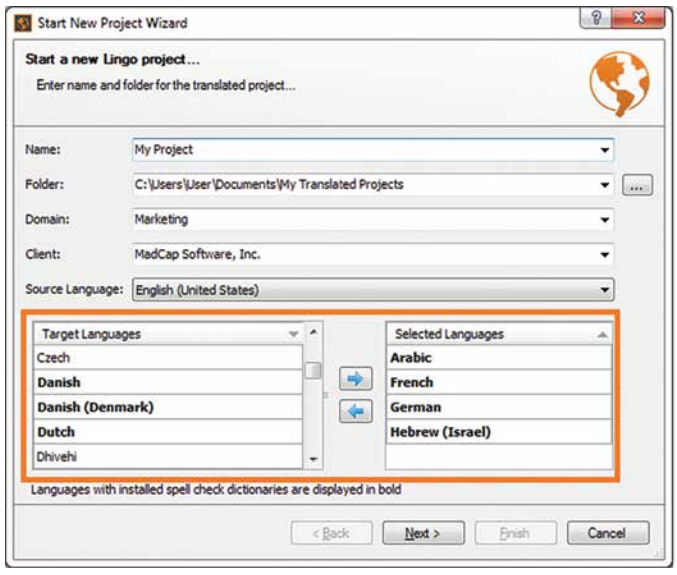

Figure 1. New Project Wizard

Machine Translation Support

Working our way through creation of the project, you come across a newly designed window that allows you to choose the translation memory (TM) resources you would like to apply to the given project, but you can then also choose no pre-translation, pre-translation with TM, or pre-translation with TM then MT (machine translation). Your choices for MT engines are currently Google®, Bing™ (Microsoft®), or *MyMemoryTranslated.net*.

The MT functionality also extends to the editor by allowing the translator to search MT suggestions using concordance search. Another benefit of the MT support is that you can set up a machine translation to post-editing workflow very easily.

I don't think this is the proper place to weigh in on the use of MT technology in live production workflows, but I do think it is important to discuss the power of this function and how to respect what it can and can't do. I know that newer buyers of translation can sometimes overestimate what MT can do. MT is not a complete replacement for human translators, but it can be an effective tool when used as a part of a workflow.

In other words, the option "pre-translate with TM then MT" is quite useful. Lingo will pre-translate everything it can possibly find from the approved and reviewed

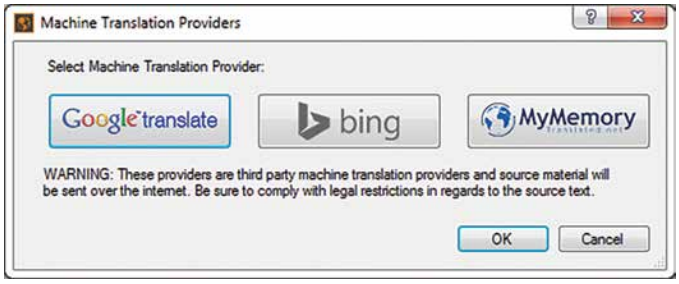
Machine Translation Providers
Select Machine Translation Provider:
Google translate
bing
MyMemory
WARNING: These providers are third party machine translation providers and source material will be sent over the internet. Be sure to comply with legal restrictions in regards to the source text.
OK
Cancel

Figure 2. Machine Translation Providers selection window

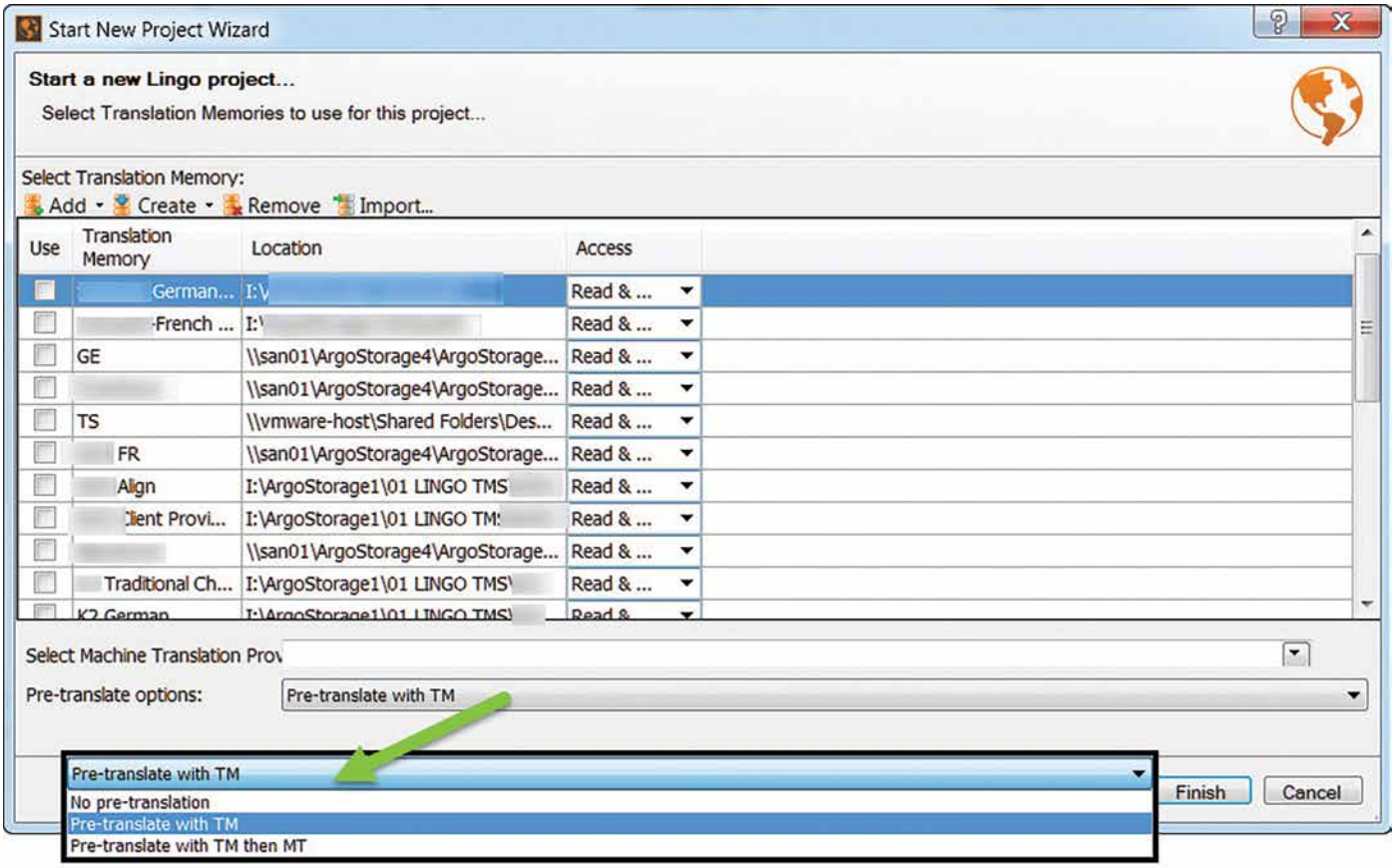

Figure 3. Choosing the appropriate pre-translation option from the New Project Wizard screen.

translation memory and then fill in any missing translation by using one of the three supported machine translation systems. In a sound workflow, that content would then be edited by a qualified linguist to make sure the translation is correct and accurate.

Not carrying out the final editing step would be a very careless mistake and would likely lead to significant errors in your translated content. Lingo makes this workflow very easy to manage, so please be sure and include a human editing pass.

Quality Assurance Reports

The ability to run quality assurance (QA) reports from within Lingo is another welcome addition. Working with structured content can be challenging for translators. The added responsibility of manipulating and moving formatting tags around and the proper placement of tags for variables and snippets can be confusing.

The ability to run a report to discover tag errors and warnings is very valuable in terms of helping the translation team to provide a final working Flare project that matches the structure of the source content. The QA reporting function also reports incorrect use of termbases, mismatching numbers between the source and target segments, untranslated segments, empty segments, and quite a few other parameters.

Many customers use terminology databases to reflect the actual user interface (UI) or software of their product. Of course the corresponding help content is loaded with these UI references. The "incorrect use of project termbases" parameter is really useful in double-checking how well the translation teams have done in terms of following the provided UI lists.

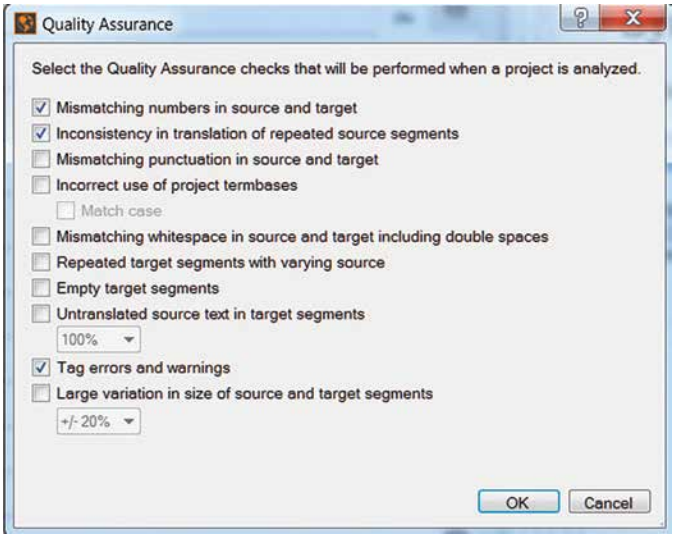
Quality Assurance
Select the Quality Assurance checks that will be performed when a project is analyzed.
Mismatching numbers in source and target
Inconsistency in translation of repeated source segments
Mismatching punctuation in source and target
Incorrect use of project termbases
Match case
Mismatching whitespace in source and target including double spaces
Repeated target segments with varying source
Empty target segments
Untranslated source text in target segments
100%
Tag errors and warnings
Large variation in size of source and target segments
+/- 20%
OK
Cancel

Figure 4. Quality Assurance screen

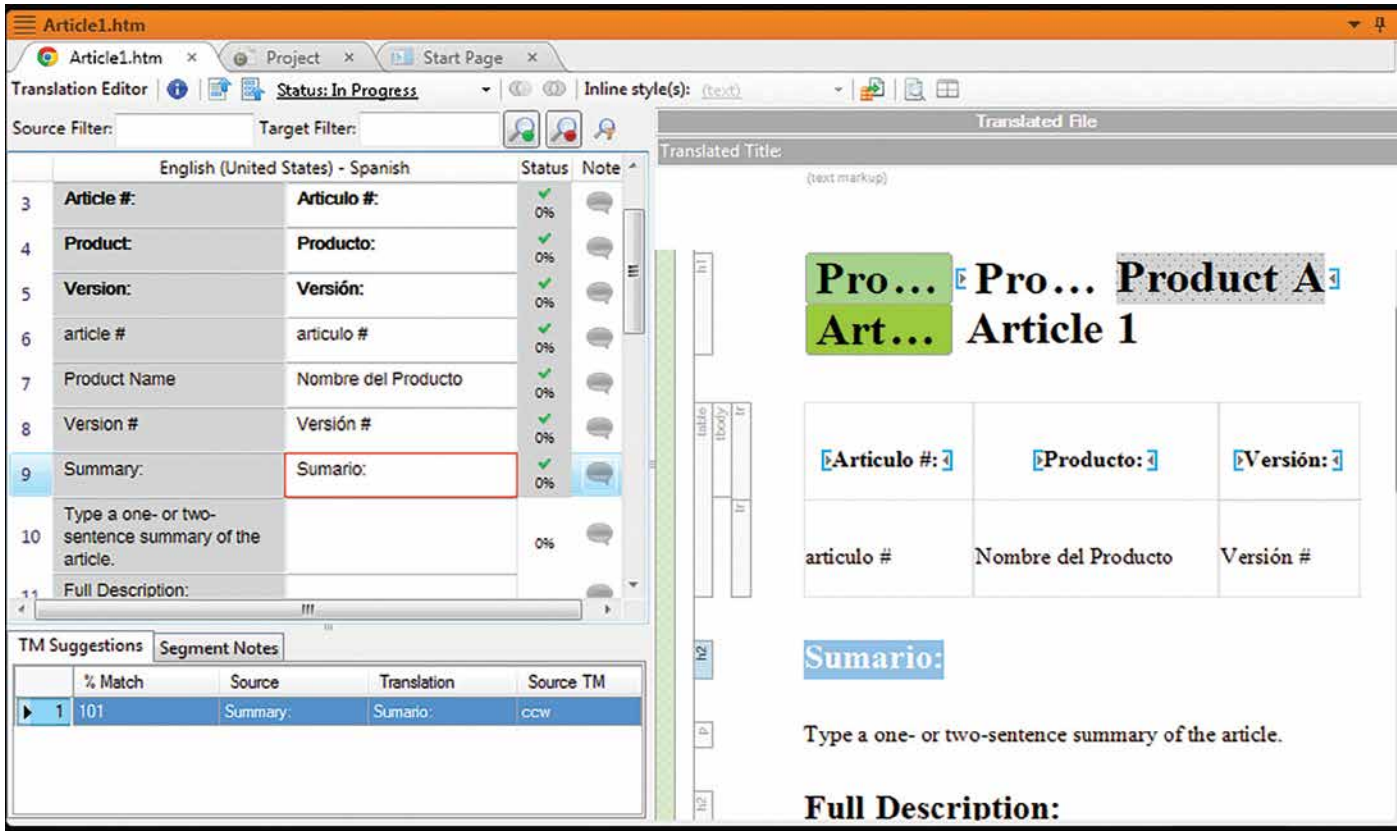

Figure 5. Translation Editor screen

Live Preview in the Translation Editor

Moving over to the translation editor, you can now quickly transition to a live preview mode for Microsoft® Word™ and PowerPoint® files, MadCap Flare files, and MadCap Capture images with callouts. This allows the translator to use a side-by-side view of the typical two-column editor window and real-time preview of the translation as it will appear in the target file format. This is a valuable enhancement that helps the translators to see their work in context.

The Extension of the Contributor Review Module to Lingo

Client/SME review is an important part of many translation workflows. Reviewing large Flare projects with multiple targets was a difficult task. It often required outputting all of the targets, collecting markups from multiple file formats, and then finding the proper place in the Flare project to implement any changes. This was incredibly tedious and, in some cases, almost impossible.

MadCap has now extended the functionality of the Contributor module to Lingo! Contributor has been around for some time in conjunction with Flare. Basically, the use of Contributor allows you to output a project package to someone who doesn't own Flare (and now Lingo) to review content and make changes or suggestions. And to add to that, Contributor used for review and annotation purposes is provided free of charge.

The use of Contributor saves a great deal of time in the review cycle by reducing the process to six simple steps:

1. Export a Review Package from a MadCap Lingo project
2. Send to third party for review
3. Third party reviews and edits file using MadCap Contributor
4. Once completed, third party exports revised Review Package file
5. Author imports the Review Package into MadCap Lingo
6. Author accepts or rejects reviewer changes using track changes

This saves a lot of manual entry and retyping by the original translator. The end result is that you get to a fully-updated translation memory and final project far faster than the manual method used previously. There is far less room for error and, of course, you get to release your product faster!

Summary

The above are just a few of the many new features and enhancements added to MadCap Lingo 9. MadCap's new release of Lingo is a strong upgrade to the previous version. The major updates all go a long way in terms of saving time and helping to increase the quality of the final translation. I can't wait to see what is in store for us in version 10.

PETER ARGONDIZZO *is the founder of Argo Translation. He started the company in 1995 while he was based in Milwaukee. Peter is fluent in Italian and majored in finance and human resource management at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He then went on to become an Italian translator and project manager for an international medical equipment manufacturer and a major airline. He has transferred his love of all things international and his experience into Chicago's premier translation agency.*

MadCap Software Acquires Doc-To-Help:

An Interview with Anthony Olivier

ON 7 JANUARY 2015, MadCap Software officially announced the acquisition of Doc-To-Help. Complementing MadCap Flare, the addition of Doc-To-Help brings together under one roof two of the industry's most popular content authoring and publishing solutions.

Recently we had an opportunity to interview Anthony Olivier, MadCap founder and CEO, and John Ayers, general manager of GrapeCity Developer Tools US, formerly ComponentOne. ComponentOne was acquired by GrapeCity in 2012. Together they discussed what the acquisition means for customers of Doc-To-Help and MadCap Flare, as well as the future of the products.

Intercom: What are the terms of the Doc-To-Help acquisition? Will Doc-To-Help relocate to MadCap Software's headquarters?

Olivier: MadCap Software has acquired all the Doc-To-Help assets, including the product source code, related intellectual property, customer accounts, and all related contracts. Doc-To-Help is a strategic addition to the company, so it is moving over to our headquarters in La Jolla, California.

Intercom: Will any members of the Doc-To-Help team be joining MadCap Software?

Olivier: All of the Doc-To-Help team members at GrapeCity have been reassigned to other positions within GrapeCity. However, we are very impressed with the talent and knowledge of the Doc-To-Help team, and we are still in discussions as to whether we may be able to bring a few of their people over to join MadCap.

Intercom: What factors were behind MadCap Software's decision to acquire the Doc-To-Help product?

Olivier: Doc-To-Help has always been the industry-leading tool for people who author in Microsoft Word, providing a unique multi-channel publishing solution that allows content creators to continue using Word as their editor of choice. As the very first technical authoring tool on the market, it also has a large and loyal customer base of users dating back to 1991.

MadCap has been running on a parallel path to Doc-To-Help since 2006 and has quickly become the industry leader for topic-based technical authoring and publishing using our award-winning, patented XML solution, which is contained in MadCap Flare.

In the wake of continued rapid growth and gains in market share, we decided to start looking at various acquisition opportunities to further expand our market share. Strategically, Doc-To-Help stood out as a highly attractive opportunity because adding this innovative Word-based authoring solution complements Madcap's toolset and offerings and allows us to reach a new customer base. At MadCap, we can now offer the technical writing industry a full spectrum of authoring solutions, regardless of the user's skillset, industry, or requirements.

The other nice synergy is that both Doc-To-Help and the full MadPak Suite of tools are Microsoft-centric, providing a solid basis for the future development of these complementary product lines.

Intercom: Why was MadCap Software an attractive suitor for Doc-To-Help?

Ayers: When Anthony and the MadCap team approached us to discuss acquiring Doc-To-Help, we were very interested in hearing what they had to say. We also saw how our Doc-To-Help product and MadCap's software provided a natural complement to each other as multi-channel offerings in the technical communication market.

Moreover, as a rapidly emerging leader in the market, MadCap has earned a reputation for delivering innovative, high quality products—and for backing these products with a support team of technical communications experts. This gave us the confidence that, under the MadCap umbrella, Doc-To-Help and our customers will be in the hands

of industry experts who will continue driving product innovation and offer first-class support.

Intercom: How is MadCap Software financially positioned to support the acquisition of Doc-To-Help?

Olivier: MadCap has been profitable since our first month shipping MadCap Flare in 2006. Since then, we've continued to grow revenue in the double digits year over year, all the while maintaining profitability and capturing market share to become the Industry standard in technical multi-channel, multi-language authoring and publishing.

At the heart of this success is our commitment to creating a superior customer experience, which has led to a very large and loyal customer base worldwide. We are excited to have Doc-To-Help customers join the MadCap family and extend to them our passion for providing first-class software and support.

Intercom: Will MadCap change the Doc-To-Help name?

Olivier: Doc-To-Help has built a lot of positive brand recognition and value, so our plan right now is to continue the current name and branding. In fact, Doc-To-Help customers and prospects will continue to use *www.doctohelp.com* for all their information and support needs.

Intercom: There is considerable overlap in functionality between Doc-To-Help and MadCap Flare, how will you position the two products?

Ayers: From our perspective, both the Doc-To-Help and MadCap Flare products are authoring and multi-channel publishing solutions, but they cater to different users and spectrums of the market.

Olivier: We agree. We consider Doc-To-Help the leading Word-based authoring solution on the market today. It is ideal for users who prefer to create content in Word, have a more book- or chapter-like approach to content development, and need to publish their content to multiple outputs from a single-source.

MadCap Flare provides a very powerful, feature-rich, built-in state-of-the-art XML-based editor for topic-based authoring. This functionality is important for technical communicators who may have larger document sets, and are looking for more advanced features and functionality supporting content re-use, content management, advanced print, enhanced Cascading Style Sheets support, or even translation management to name a few. For these users, Microsoft Word as an editor is not enough to meet their needs.

Additionally, MadCap Flare is seamlessly integrated with other MadCap products—such as MadCap Lingo for translation, MadCap Mimic for software simulation movies and videos, MadCap Capture for image capture and graphics editing, and MadCap Pulse for socially-enabled online content, among others.

We also believe that, as the Word-based authors' projects, teams, complexities, and potentially languages grow, they may eventually outgrow the functionality of Microsoft Word and therefore need a seamless transition to a more powerful and possibly integrated solution. MadCap can now offer these users an easy transition to the power of XML, topic-based authoring, and content management—all from the same trusted Industry leader.

Intercom: What advice do you give customers or prospects trying to decide between using MadCap Flare or Doc-To-Help?

Olivier: As we discussed, both products are best-in-class solutions, but they have different strengths and serve different requirements. We recommend that people contact us so we can learn more about their projects and what they are looking to achieve, walk them through the different solutions, and together determine which product best meets their needs.

Intercom: What do you have on the product roadmap for Doc-To-Help and MadCap Flare? Will they continue as two different products?

Olivier: We will continue to support and develop both products independently for the foreseeable future. At the same time, each product has its strengths, and we will be looking at features and functionality that can possibly be leveraged across products to maximize the benefit for all customers. We will also look at opportunities for integrating the products, since it's not uncommon for different groups within a large enterprise to use both tools.

Ayers: It is worth noting that MadCap has already created an enhanced version of Doc-To-Help, which has launched in conjunction with the completion of the acquisition.

Olivier: Yes, we have just delivered Doc-To-Help 2014 V2, which adds an Office 2013 ribbon interface look and feel, a new "Theme" wizard, a number of bug fixes, and inclusion of MadCap licensing and trial behavior.

Intercom: Who will handle Doc-To-Help sales?

Olivier: All future sales will continue through the MadCap territory reps, and we are working to introduce all existing Doc-To-Help customers to their new account managers.

Intercom: How is product support for Doc-To-Help customers being handled?

Olivier: Doc-To-Help support will now be provided by the award-winning US-based MadCap team of technical support experts. We will continue to support those

Doc-To-Help customers with active maintenance plans and will honor the same terms and conditions as their currently active Platinum or Bronze support plans.

Intercom: What do current Doc-To-Help users need to do in order to move their current support plans over to MadCap support?

Olivier: Current Doc-To-Help maintenance plan customers will receive a new MadCap Doc-To-Help maintenance key for the remainder of their service agreement. All current support plan holders will need to visit the Doc-To-Help Support page (*http://www.doctohelp.com/support/*) and use the new key to open a support case. Doc-To-Help customers with active Platinum support plans can also call MadCap Support at +1 858-320-0387, option 3.

Intercom: What is the plan for training the MadCap sales and support teams on Doc-To-Help?

Olivier: All of our MadCap sales and technical support staff have undergone training of the Doc-To-Help product. We are ready and able to take any sales and support inquiries.

Intercom: What impact does the Doc-To-Help acquisition have on technical support for existing MadCap customers?

Olivier: The acquisition has no impact on the support previously provided for our customers. We have staffed sufficiently to handle the new Doc-To-Help users. Additionally, all our support staff has been cross-trained in MadCap and Doc-To-Help products.

Intercom: What, if any, changes do you expect to see in community support for either Doc-To-Help or MadCap Flare?

Olivier: There are no changes to the current MadCap Flare community support. Doc-To-Help community support previously provided via public forums will also continue. Doc-To-Help users can connect to these forums from *www.doctohelp.com*.

By having both Doc-To-Help and Flare under the same company, we also see the ability for the communities to slowly come together and expand the ability of all our customers to communicate with other experienced professionals they didn't have access to before.

Intercom: Can a current Doc-To-Help user migrate to MadCap Flare or vice versa?

Olivier: Yes, there are a number of ways to migrate Doc-To-Help content to MadCap Flare. The transition can be very easy, particularly since Doc-To-Help is a Word-based product. However, it also depends on a user's projects and experience level. Similarly, there are a number of ways to migrate content from Flare to Doc-To-Help.

As mentioned previously, our world-class technical support team is trained on both products, and we have been transitioning customers to Flare from other products since 2006. We will be more than happy to assist customers through the transition process from Doc-To-Help to Flare or from Flare to Doc-To-Help. Either way, we will work closely with the customer to ensure that the conversion process is a smooth one.

Intercom: What will happen to existing Doc-To-Help and MadCap channel partners?

Ayers: Interestingly, there are many resellers today that already sell both Doc-To-Help and MadCap Flare. This is another synergy of the acquisition.

Olivier: That's right. For the resellers that already carry both Doc-To-Help and MadCap products, the only difference is that they will now be working with one company. Other current Doc-To-Help resellers and channel partners will be required to sign reseller agreements with MadCap Software, which allow them to not only continue selling Doc-To-Help but also begin selling MadCap products, as well. For a list of approved Doc-To-Help resellers, visit (*http://www.doctohelp.com/resellers/*).

At the same time, with the addition of Doc-To-Help to MadCap, current MadCap resellers and channel partners worldwide will now to be able to add this product offering to their inventory list of items to sell.

It gives all resellers an opportunity to provide customers with more options to find the product that best suits their needs.

Intercom: Does MadCap have any other acquisitions or plans in the works to expand market share beyond this acquisition?

Olivier: Yes we do. However, due to confidentiality, we cannot discuss these in any detail at this time. What I can say is that we have some very exciting plans for the future that will greatly benefit our customers and also enable MadCap to expand into adjacent markets.

Intercom: Any last thoughts?

Ayers: We are very pleased to have found a good home for our Doc-To-Help product and customers. With MadCap Software, we are confident that our Doc-To-Help users have a provider who truly cares about the community, will continue to drive product innovation, and will deliver best-in-class support for years to come.

Olivier: Doc-To-Help has built a market-leading product and worldwide customer loyalty. With Doc-To-Help now solidly part of the MadCap family, we look forward to building on that success.

Coming Attractions ...

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21–24 June 2015

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See http://summit.stc.org for details as they become available.

Call for Entries for the 2015 International Summit Awards

BY ELIZABETH BAILEY | *International Summit Awards Committee*

THE SOCIETY for Technical Communication's International Summit Awards (ISA) competition is accepting chapter or regional entries through **31 January 2015**. To qualify, the entry must have been produced or substantially revised within 24 months prior to 1 September 2014 and won an Award of Excellence or Distinguished Technical Communication Award at a local or regional STC competition in 2014–15. All STC ISA entries must be submitted using the online submission form at *http://summit.stc.org/competitions/*.

We continue to use the same four categories of entries:

- Informational Materials
- Instructional Materials
- Promotional Materials
- User Support Materials

Information on these categories and rules for all entries, including information specific to submitting electronic entries, can be viewed on *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/competitions*; click the "STC ISA General Information and Rules" link under the Resources header.

If you are submitting paper-based entries, once you have completed the online submission form, send entries that qualify for the STC ISA Competition to:

STC International Summit Awards
c/o Elizabeth Bailey
3101 Gaylord Pkwy
Frisco, TX 75034

Each physical submission must include:

- **Four** copies of each entry
- Completed online entry submission form for each entry (with a printed copy of the completed entry submission form attached to **each** of the four copies)
- Payment: Check(s) made payable to STC or online credit card payment. Nonrefundable fee per entry in U.S. dollars only:
  - $75 members
  - $125 nonmembers
  - Add $15 per hard copy entry submission. Posters larger than 11x17" are exempt from the hard copy fee. STC encourages entries to be uploaded electronically using the online entry form to avoid the $15 fee.

When paying by check, please mail a printed copy of the online entry submission form with the check to:

Molly Jin
Society for Technical Communication
9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300
Fairfax, VA 22031

Entries that win a Distinguished Technical Communication Award at the international level will be displayed at the STC Summit in June. The Best of Show winner will be recognized at the Honors Reception at the STC Summit. All entries will receive written critiques from qualified technical communicators regardless of award level. Entrants say that written critiques are the most beneficial part of submitting an entry.

For more information, please see *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/competitions* or contact the Entries Manager Elizabeth Bailey at *bethbailey6@gmail.com*.

2015 Election Slate

THE STC NOMINATING Committee (composed of members Phylise Banner, Donn DeBoard, Marta Rauch, Andrea Wenger, and Chair Aiessa Moyna) is pleased to announce the final slate of candidates for the 2015 Society election.

President

Bernard Aschwanden will automatically succeed from the office of Vice President

Vice President

- Adriane Hunt
- Christopher Ward

Treasurer

- Jane Wilson

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Director (two positions to be elected)

- Craig Baehr
- Cindy Pao
- Lisa Pietrangeli
- Kirk St.Amant
- Kirsty Taylor

Nominating Committee (two positions to be elected)

- Ramesh Aiyyangar
- Cindy Currie Clifford
- Viqui Dill
- Rick Lippincott

Congratulations to the candidates, and thanks to all STC members who expressed interest in running for office. The slate was prepared in accordance with the current Society bylaws. Detailed information about the candidates and access to an online forum for posing questions to the candidates will be provided soon.

The Society election is scheduled to open on **9 March and close on 20 March 2015**. To be eligible to vote, members must have paid their dues by **31 January 2015**.

Welcome to the North Market in Columbus!

BY LYNN NICKELS | *Member*

LOOKING FOR AN ECLECTIC taste experience while attending the 2015 STC Summit? Then a short walk is all that is needed to satisfy your adventurous palate! The North Market is located across the street from the Columbus Convention Center, just west of N. High St. between Vine and Spruce, at 59 Spruce St.

Have a hankering for Indian food? Delectable deli sandwiches? Homemade ice cream? It's all here! From Pizza to fish to BBQ, there is something for everyone. Dining choices include: Taste of Belgium, Best of the Wurst, Hubert's Polish Kitchen, Nida's Sushi, and many more.

Personally, I prefer the amazing deli sandwiches at Katzinger's. I've eaten here many times and have never been disappointed. But come hungry! The portions are huge. Katzinger's is best known for their famous Rueben sandwiches, but also offers tuna, turkey, and roast beef. Soups are on the menu, but my favorite food here, if memory serves, is the cheesecake!

In addition to food vendors, the North Market offers a variety of unique food and specialty items for purchase. You must stop by the Pure Imagination Chocolatier for unique chocolates, truffles, and sweet, dark concoctions for a gift for someone else or a treat for yourself. Varieties even include sugar free!

Cheese, teas, and specialty coffees are also available at Curds & Whey; Bubbles, the Tea and Juice, Co.; and Stauf's Coffee Roasters.

Finish off your lunch with dessert at Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream—homemade deliciousness in the form of ice cream, frozen yogurt, and sorbet make it hard to decide. Or, maybe stop by the Omega Baking Company, where you can choose from warm, flaky croissants or gooey cinnamon rolls, while you sit upstairs and look out over the bustling North Market from the second level. (Can you tell I have a bit of a sweet tooth?)

www.shutterstock.com/ Brent Hofacker

www.shutterstock.com/ aceshot1

There's so much to choose from, you may have to stop over more than once for lunch during the conference. But don't eat too much—you don't want to snooze during the afternoon sessions!

The North Market's hours are Monday, 9 AM–5 PM; Tuesday–Friday, 9 AM–7 PM; Saturday, 8 AM–5 PM; and Sunday, noon–5 PM.

Check out the North Market before you go. Market map: *www.northmarket.com/portals/0/pdf/northMarket_map.pdf*

Parking is also available: *www.northmarket.com/directions-parking.aspx*

Bon Appétit!

Getting Support from Your Supervisor

WOULD YOUR EMPLOYER be willing to pay at least part of the expenses of attending the Technical Communication Summit in Columbus, Ohio, from 21–24 June? It couldn't hurt to ask! Consider writing a memo to your supervisor that explains how you and your firm would benefit from your attendance. The following model is based on a memo that worked for its author. Feel free to modify it for use within your company.

Dear [your supervisor's name]:

I understand that our company is cutting back on training costs and we are looking for ways to get the most for the money we spend in every area. There is a cost-effective professional education conference in June that will help [your company] reduce expenses in translation costs, structured authoring, project management of reports and publications, as well as several other areas.

I would like to attend the 2015 Technical Communication Summit in Columbus, OH, on 21–24 June, presented by the Society for Technical Communication. The Summit is packed with more than 80 sessions over the three full workdays with topics covering all aspects of technical writing, editing, project management, and publication production. The preliminary program is currently available online, and when the full schedule of sessions is released in February we can go over the list together to determine which ones will benefit the company most.

With most conferences, the challenge has always been to get to as many of the higher priority sessions as possible. That's where the Summit is different! STC now includes SUMMIT@aClick in the registration fee. This is an online collection of the conference's content. It's like being able to bring the entire content of the conference back to share with the rest of the company. This increases the value of my participation tenfold. Not only does it capture the audio and visual presentations of the speakers, its content can be shared and revisited for a year after the conference.

Costs: [List transportation costs, registration fee, cost of meals, and the price per night of the hotel room. The conference room rate at the conference hotel is $164.00 plus tax for Single or Double]

Summary of Benefits for [your company]: With the current economic conditions, everyone at [your company] is being asked to do more and control costs wherever possible. This conference is a small investment in empowering me and others involved in [technical communication efforts] to do even more. The sessions will provide us with more knowledge of report production, editing, writing, management concepts, and government contracting. This knowledge will enable us to handle [a particular client or project] with more professionalism and confidence, which will reflect favorably on [your company]. And with SUMMIT@aClick, I will be able to pass on much of this information to coworkers—it provides me a recording of most of the sessions after the conference, so I can return to areas of interest over and over again as needed and share it with colleagues.

Thank you very much for considering this request.

Track Descriptions

EACH YEAR, the Conference Chair and Program Advisory Committee assess industry trends, other activities in the technical communication profession, and feedback gathered from previous Summits. The 2015 Technical Communication Summit introduces tracks that represent core technical communication skills:

- Art, Design, and Visual Communication, for topics such as hypergraphics, information design, video, and user experience.
- Leadership and Management, for new managers, DocOps, and document teams.
- Tools and Technology, for sessions on Web services, Git, markup, DITA, and open-source project tools.
- Training and Research, to address topics in online education, instructional design, and academic research.
- Writing and Communication, for topics such as content marketing, creating useful copy, writing for mobile, and developing technical presentations.

Proposals submitted through the Call for Presentations also reveal a great deal about what our colleagues are working on and want to share with each other. As a result, we added two specialty tracks: 1) API Documentation and 2) Consulting and Small Business Management.

The full schedule of sessions and speakers will be posted on the Summit website: *summit.stc.org.*

STC on the Web

BY NICOLETTA A. BLEIEL | *Senior Member*

IN THIS INSTALLMENT of "The Essentials," I am going to focus on a topic that is not about the profession per se, but is a very important resource for technical communicators—the Society for Technical Communication website (*www.stc.org*). It provides a wealth of information for technical communicators who are STC members, and there is useful information for nonmembers as well.

Publications

Links to all STC publications—*Intercom* magazine, the *Technical Communication* journal, the *STC's Notebook* blog, the Salary Database, the TechComm Today e-newsletter and more—are located at *www.stc.org/publications*.

Open the *Intercom* page, and you'll find information about writing for *Intercom*, as well as links to *Intercom Online* and the PDF archive page (complete issues of *Intercom* are available as PDFs back to 2005). You must login to read articles or download PDFs. Click on the cover of the latest issue to download the current PDF.

Technical Communication is STC's archival, peer-reviewed journal. Open the *Technical Communication* page to access *Technical Communication* online and the back issue archive on Ingenta (back to 1995).

This column is a one-page, quick reference guide exploring "essential" technical communication topics. Nicky Bleiel is a Watson Information Developer at IBM and the Immediate Past President of STC. Learn more at *nickybleiel.com*.

The *Salary Database* is drawn from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics data and highlights important trends in the demand for technical communication professionals. Open the *Salary Database* page to download it; nonmembers can purchase the report or check out the free preview version.

Education

Links to information about the wide world of STC educational opportunities—the Summit (annual conference) occuring 21–24 June 2015, upcoming live webinars and online courses, recorded webinars (there are over 140 free to members, as well as those available for a fee), and the mentor board, are located at *www.stc.org/education*.

Membership

The membership page lists the STC benefits and rates, as well as links to join or renew online. If you need a paper application, a brochure, tax information and more, see the list of links at the bottom of the page at *www.stc.org/membership*.

Job Bank

Information about the popular STC Job Bank can be found at *www.stc.org/job-bank*. There are job opportunities posted for members and nonmembers, and job seekers can post resumes and set up alerts. Members get a 14 day advance viewing of all new postings.

Potpourri

Log in to the STC website, then hover over **MYSTC** in the main navigation menu to update your account, change your password, access the STC Member Directory, check out STC merchandise and logos, and more. Hover over **ABOUT** in the main navigation menu to learn more about the Society, including the mission and vision, governance, staff directory, communities, and leadership opportunities.

Like most websites, STC's is a wealth of information and you will need to explore to discover it all. I hope this quick tour helps get you started.

www.shutterstock.com/ manaemedia

Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 26–29 Jan 2015
The **Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS)** 2015 will be held at Innisbrook Golf and Spa Resort in Palm Harbor, FL. This year's theme is "Unleashing R&M Knowledge." For more information, contact:
RAMS
+1 (603) 863-2832
www.rams.org

2 12–16 Feb
The 2015 **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)** Annual Meeting will take place at the San Jose Convention Center in San Jose, CA. The theme is "Innovations, Information, and Imaging." For more information, please contact:
AAAS
+1 (202) 326-6450
meetings@aaas.org
http://meetings.aaas.org

3 18 March
The **Association of Teachers of Technical Writing** will hold its annual conference in Tampa, FL. The theme is "Exploring the Value of Technical Communication." For more information, contact:
ATTW
meloncon@tek-ritr.com
www.attw.org/conference

4 28 March
The **STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter** will hold its annual Mid-Atlantic TechComm Conference at the Giant Conference Center in Willow Grove, PA. For more information, visit:
www.stcpmc.org/conference

5 24–29 Apr
The **International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI)** will hold its Performance Improvement Conference at the Hyatt Regency in San Antonio, TX. For more information, contact:
ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2015

6 30 Apr–1 May
The **American Society for Indexing (ASI)** will be holding its annual conference in Seattle, WA. For more information, contact:
ASI
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org/conference-2015/

7 21–24 June
The **Society for Technical Communication** hosts the Technical Communication Summit in Columbus, OH. For more information, contact:
STC
+1 (703) 522-4114
http://summit.stc.org

* STC-related event

FEMA Detective

BY BARBARA GLYNN | *Member*

HAVE YOU EVER followed the track of an approaching hurricane on the nightly news or The Weather Channel? Watched as the storm hit ground zero—debris hurling through the air, waves overtaking tops of houses, listened to the press conference of a concerned governor and an interview with an exhausted evacuee? You probably have. But have you ever thought about how municipalities rebuild after a catastrophic natural disaster or how small communities with few funds pay to repair roads and sewage systems?

Immediately after a disaster, local emergency managers send estimated damage data to the state. The estimates are reviewed to determine if the state is able to see the recovery process through to completion without federal aid. Infrastructure damage is tallied separately from that of home and business owners for two different types of disaster declarations. At FEMA, we unofficially call the former a Public Assistance (PA) disaster and the latter an Individual Assistance (IA) disaster. Should the damages near or exceed the state's threshold, the governor will ask that FEMA deploy reservists to team with the state for development of Preliminary Damage Assessments (PDAs). PDAs for a Public Assistance declaration will include damage estimates for state and local governments, some private non-profits with essential services, and Native American tribes. The state tabulates the final PDA results and presents them to the governor in a letter. Should the damages be great enough, by law (the *Stafford Act* specifically), the governor requests a disaster declaration from the president.

When deployed to a Public Assistance disaster, my job is to advise local governments of hazard mitigation methods to include while rebuilding their infrastructure. Mitigation methods are financially restricted in correspondence to the full cost of repairs, the mitigation must relate to the damaged element only and be appropriate to the disaster. The purpose, of course, is to reduce the loss of life and property should there be another natural disaster.

The writing is straightforward, no-frills technical writing. It may sound dry, but each damaged 96-inch corrugated metal culvert; 250-foot long historic bridge; outdoor, aluminum, mobile-sculpture; and below-grade high school gymnasium has its function, a cause of damage specific to its qualities and the event, and a connection to its surroundings. These characteristics must be fully examined before a mitigation plan is determined.

Sometimes I think of my job as watching a mystery where I learned in the first scene who the killer was; I just don't know how the detective will catch the criminal. For example, I know that there were heavy rains and flooding (the criminal). Now 250 feet of road and a 60-foot long, 96-inch diameter culvert that passed under that road are missing (the victim). What exactly caused the culvert to fail and then cause the road to wash out (modus operandi)? What mitigation can be done when replacing the culvert to keep this from happening again (the arrest)? Tax dollars and lives are at stake.

Sometimes I think of my job as watching a mystery where I learned in the first scene who the killer was; I just don't know how the detective will catch the criminal.

As a FEMA reservist in the Hazard Mitigation cadre, I have been called to work at federally declared disasters caused by floods, tornadoes, and earthquakes. We reservists are expected to be ready to deploy within 24 hours of their assignment for a minimum of 30 days, but that can often last a few months or longer. My longest deployment was for one year in Iowa after the 2008 flooding. I learned a lot about corn. Seriously.

That's the other part of my job that I love. I travel to parts of the United States that I might never have seen. I get to learn the history and culture in areas that are not the typical tourist destination, especially if your mode of travel is flying. I've had the chance to shake hands with a few important politicians, and I've met many people trying to pull themselves together after a disaster and other people going about lives I might never heard of. It has been a fascinating job.

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(Monday-Friday, 5am-7pm PST)

*The full version license of Adobe Technical Communication Suite 5 retails at $1,699——which is 57% less expensive than buying all individual products separately.

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